IT ALL
CAME TRUE



MARY F. LEONARD

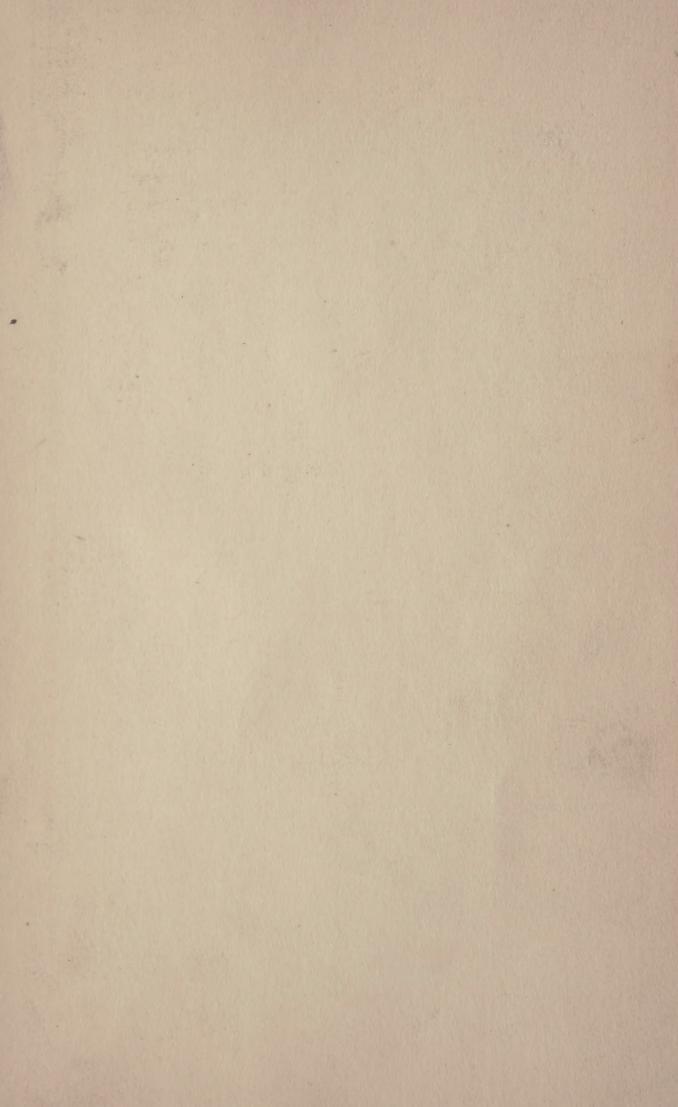


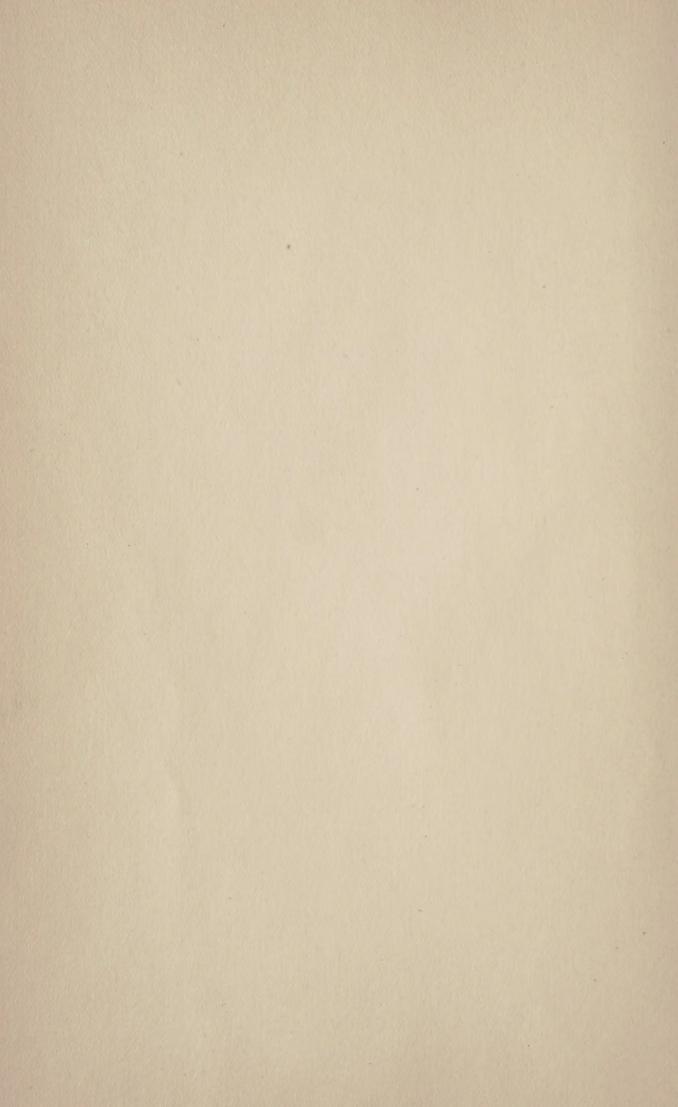
Class PZ7

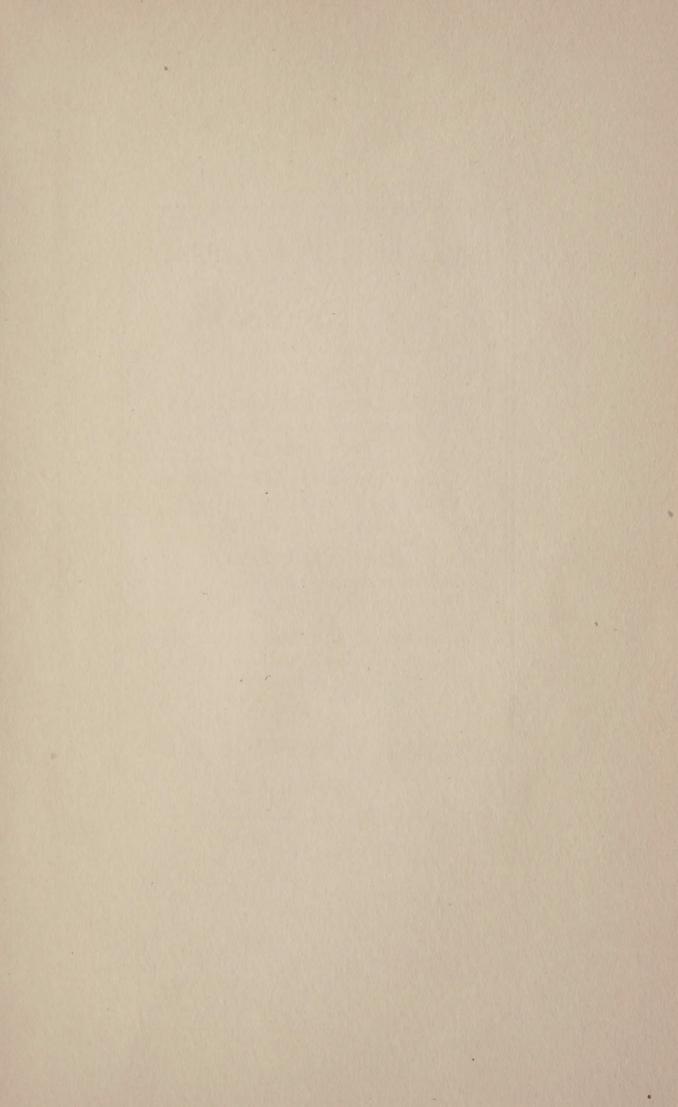
Book L55I

Copyright No.

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.







Books By Mary F. Leonard

The Cat and the Candle

Frontispiece and illuminated covers. 50 cts. Postpaid

Half a Dozen Thinking Caps

Frontispiece and illuminated covers. 50 cts. Postpaid

How the Two Ends Met

Illustrated. Bound in ornamental cloth. 60 cts. net. Postage 10 cts.

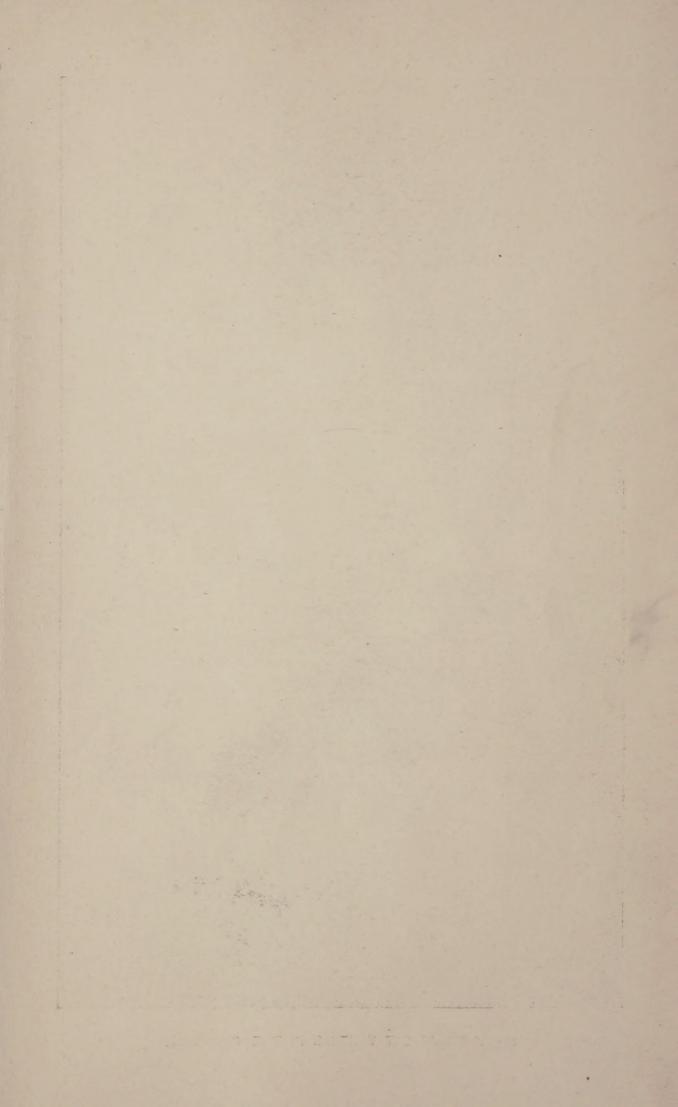
It All Came True

Illustrated. Bound in ornamental cloth. 60 cts. net. Postage 10 cts.

The Story of the Big Front Door

Illustrated. Bound in ornamental cloth. \$1.25 Postpaid

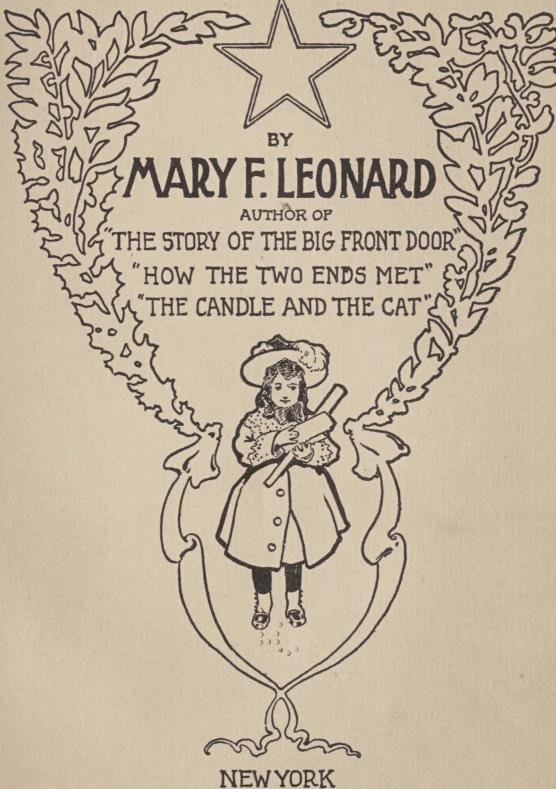
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.





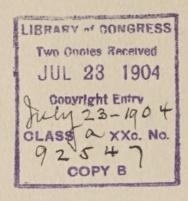
MARY GRACE SAT WAITING IN THE CARRIAGE.

IT ALL CAME TRUE



NEWYORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
PUBLISHERS

P27

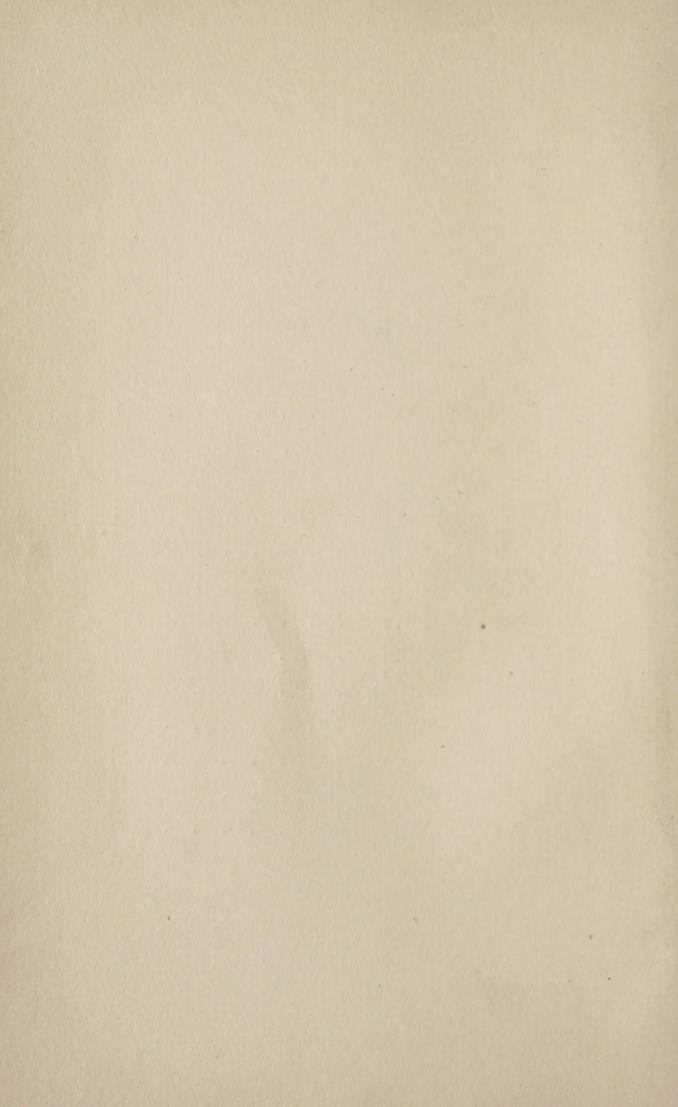


Copyright, 1904,
By Thomas Y. Crowell & Company.

Published September, 1904.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER				PAGE
I. MARY GRACE				1
II. UNCLE WILL				10
III. How IT HAPPENED ,				24
IV. Cousin Polly				34
V. THE PLOT THICKENS.				50
VI. STARS		•		62
VII. NELLIE				75
VIII. SHOPPING				87
IX. A BLANK PAGE				96
X. Preparations				105
XI. AUNT CLARICE				114
XII. HELPING SANTA CLAUS				128
XIII. A HAPPY NEW YEAR.				135



IT ALL CAME TRUE

CHAPTER I

MARY GRACE

Mary Grace sat waiting in the carriage while Miss Susanne bought something in the drug-store. It was a busy corner: trolley cars whizzed back and forth and crowds of people passed along the sidewalk and in and out of the shops, yet Mary Grace felt lonely and the corners of her mouth had a pensive droop.

"Did you ever get left?" called one small newsboy to another as he darted across the street and sold a paper to a tall man who had beckoned. Mary Grace repeated the phrase to herself: "Did you

ever get left?" She did not know what the boy meant by it but it seemed quite accurately to express her own condition.

Next to the drug-store were some large show windows full of interesting things. Mary Grace had suggested getting out to look at them, but Miss Susanne had assured her there was nothing there she would care for, it was only the Ten Cent Store.

Now why should Miss Susanne think because she herself did not care for the Ten Cent Store that Mary Grace would not? What could be more splendid than the glittering array of tin pans on a crimson background; the picture frames, ribbons, artificial flowers, candies and many other things to eat, to wear, or to look at? Grown people were all like this. "Why, child, you don't want that," they would say, and all the time you did want it dreadfully.

Sitting there in the carriage, her small

hands folded on her lap, her delicate face with its dark eyes and its frame of redbrown hair, looking gravely out from beneath the white plume that curled over the brim of her velvet hat, it occurred to her how nice it would be to go shopping all by herself. She would enter the door which a rather dirty boy was diligently swinging back and forth by means of a rope attached to the latch; she would walk down the aisle with its delightful variety of wares on either hand, and from these she would make a selection, taking out her small purse with her monogram in gold upon it, when the time came to pay. The faint pink in Mary Grace's cheeks deepened, her heart beat faster at the thought of such an adventure. Not that she would ever dare really. Somebody always held her hand when she walked along the street. As for shopping, Aunt Clarice said there was danger of catching something in the crowd.

In imagination she had selected a chain of pearl beads such as she saw in the window, and which to her eyes looked just like those her mother sometimes wore around her lovely throat, when with a tremendous pull the doorkeeper let out two little girls in gray coats and hats exactly alike. Their faces were round and rosy, one had curls, and the other braids tied up behind her ears with red bows, they carried packages and they were both laughing.

They stopped for a second at the window and the one with curls called out, "O Nansie, look at this darling dog."

And Nansie exclaimed in her turn, "O Cousin Polly, do look at this dog." Then Mary Grace saw that a lady and a little boy had followed them out of the store.

Cousin Polly, who was a comfortable looking person with a face almost as rosy as the children's showed some pretty white teeth as she said, "Truly beautiful! Now, chickens, hurry, or we'll be late."

As the little girl with the red bows turned, she looked straight at Mary Grace and then smiled,—yes, actually. Mary Grace longed to smile back, but it seemed as if she had forgotten how. She knew now that she had seen these children before, playing in the yard of the house next door to her own home.

In a minute more they were lost in the crowd, and again Mary Grace had the sensation so well described by the newsboy's words. When Miss Susanne came out of the drug-store and the carriage rolled smoothly toward the park, over and over under her breath she repeated them: "Did you ever get left?"

"Did you ever get left, Miss Susanne?" What made her say it, she did not know.

"Why, Mary Grace, where did you hear such an expression? It is slang. Never use it again." Miss Susanne was shocked; her voice was stern.

Mary Grace had never heard of slang but she asked no questions; retiring into her corner she began to think about those children who seemed to be having such a very good time. The lady they called Cousin Polly certainly looked like a person to have a good time with,—and where were they going? she wondered. She wished Miss Susanne would let her walk down town sometime and look in the shop windows, but she felt it was of no use to ask. Miss Susanne said she was a fortunate little girl to have a carriage to ride in and lovely clothes to wear, but when she said it she looked very grave, not at all as if she were glad.

The thing Mary Grace liked best in the park was the artificial-lake where the geese enjoyed themselves and paddled about upside down in a way that was immensely amusing, but this afternoon they seemed to have taken a vow not to go near the water. Watts the footman got down and tried to shoo them in, all to no purpose. With much flapping of wings and discordant squawking they persisted in running the wrong way. Mary Grace looked on with disappointed eyes. It really seemed as if she were left again.

"Why do you suppose they don't want to swim?" she asked.

"Perhaps it is too chilly," Miss Susanne replied, and then observing the wistfulness of the little face she added, "We will go home now and read something out of your new story book." She put her arm around Mary Grace who nestled against her and felt a little comforted.

Miss Susanne was very kind sometimes,
Mary Grace was fond of her, only of late,
—since so many changes had come, she too
had been different. When you talked to

her you suddenly found she wasn't listening, for she would say, "yes" when she couldn't possibly have meant it, and she was always reading letters.

"Miss Susanne, I wish I could play with those little children next door. I saw them down town."

"But, Mary Grace, your Auntie wouldn't like it, and I feel a great responsibility now she is away. We know nothing about those children, very probably they haven't nice manners," was Miss Susanne's answer.

"Dorothy Van Cleeve doesn't have nice manners; she hit Charlie with a stick and made him cry. I don't like Dorothy," declared Mary Grace.

"That is a very wrong way in which to speak of one of your little friends," Miss Susanne said reprovingly, but she didn't defend Dorothy's manners.

Mary Grace was puzzled. Dorothy certainly hadn't nice manners, yet she was

allowed to play with Dorothy. On more than one occasion Aunt Clarice had complained of Mary Grace's own manners,—when she hung her head and wouldn't speak to people. Why did it make so much difference about those children next door?

It was of no use to continue the argument however, for Miss Susanne had taken out another letter and was reading it. Mary Grace heard her say something under her breath,—it sounded like, "what shall I do?"

After this there was silence as the carriage rolled homeward. Mary Grace sat up very straight looking out, and upon every child they passed her eyes rested wistfully. There were so many children and she hadn't any to play with.

Presently the carriage turned into a gravel road through a tall iron gateway guarded by two grim-looking stone lions.

Mary Grace was at home.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE WILL

They hailed the car at the corner and Cousin Polly shooed them on board as if they had been chickens really. Nansie dropped her package and when she stooped to pick it up, Nina, who was just behind and not looking where she was going, tumbled over her, and Little Boy Brown, who was in front, in an effort to be helpful and get Nansie's package, bumped heads with her. Such a time as there was. Even the conductor who had a hard day and wasn't feeling cheerful couldn't help smiling as he tried to untangle them.

"Stop laughing at once or I'll never take you down town again," said Cousin Polly,

as she piloted her charges into some seats. If you had not seen her face you might have thought she was scolding.

The car was rather full so Cousin Polly and the little girls had to squeeze into one seat, while Little Boy Brown occupied an infinitesimal amount of space next a very stout man.

After they were finally settled and had accumulated some breath, Nina asked, "Cousin Polly, did you see the little girl in the carriage in front of the Ten Cent Store?"

"I don't remember that I did."

"I saw her," said Nansie. "She had on a green velvet coat, and—"

"Well—" Nina interrupted, "she is that poor little rich girl who lives next door."

"The Princess?" asked Little Boy Brown, tumbling off his seat in the effort to join in the conversation. "Explain yourselves," said Cousin Polly, helping him up. "Why do you call her poor if she is rich, and how comes a princess to be living next door to us?"

"Why, Cousin Polly, what do you think?—they never let her go anywhere or play with anybody but just only her governess," cried Nina.

"And we pretend she is a princess and lives in a palace—don't you know, Cousin Polly?—with lions in front—and we play she can't get out, and that some day we are going to rescue her. L. B. is going to help." Nansie paused for breath.

"This is thrilling," said Cousin Polly.

"Are you sure she wants to get out?"

"I'd like to ride in a carriage and wear a velvet coat," remarked Nina, turning for a moment to the other side of the picture.

"The moral is that you can't have everything in this life," Cousin Polly said, laughing. The car stopped to let some people off, and as it went on again a tall young man who had been watching Cousin Polly and the children ever since they got on, leaned forward across the aisle and held out his hand, "Miss Clinton, I have been trying to make sure it was you," he said.

"Will! is it possible? I am delighted. How you've—grown," Cousin Polly ended with a laugh, then holding up her hand quickly she added, "Now don't tell me I have too,—I see it in your eyes."

"You haven't changed a bit, not a bit," he replied.

"I don't like fibs either, however we'll let it pass. I was thinking of you yesterday, Will,—wondering if you were here and if I should see you."

"You certainly shall if you will give me the chance to show myself. Where are you staying?"

"I am visiting my cousin Mrs. Blanchard.

At present she is away and I am taking care of the children. Nina and Nansie, this is an old friend of mine, Mr. Sargent.

The little girls smiled and shook hands, then Nina said, "This is our corner, Cousin Polly."

"We are going to the Flower Show," Miss Clinton explained. "Come to see me, Will,—964 Bronson Street."

"You must be a neighbor of mine," said Mr. Sargent as he helped Miss Clinton, the children and the parcels off the car. When he took his seat again he was still smiling. "It brings back old times to see Miss Polly," he thought. He recalled her laughing words, "How you've grown." There had seemed to be a question in the searching glance she gave him. Why did it make him a little uncomfortable? Was it that in the light of her pleasant eyes, that brought back his happy school days, he

felt conscious of not having grown in the way she expected.

It was just for a moment, then he dismissed the idea. Mr. William Sargent had formed the comfortable habit of considering himself a very good sort of fellow. His family and friends encouraged him in it. His complacency was not easily upset. Still he was honestly glad to see Miss Polly. When he left the car he walked slowly up the street looking at the houses with new interest. The neighborhood had once been the center of fashion and wealth, but that was a good while ago. Now the most that remained of it was the old Sargent mansion with its pillared front, its sweeping driveway, its garden and hothouses.

"964" repeated Mr. Sargent, "Why it is next door, how very odd!"

964 was a plain, old-time, red brick house with outside shutters and white

window frames. A not unattractive place Mr. Sargent now remarked. There was an air of smiling comfort about it. Plants bloomed in the windows from which the curtains were drawn back. The brick walk was newly reddened, the stone steps freshly whitened, the brass knocker on the front door far outshone the electric bell although its days of usefulness were passed. In the middle of the yard stood a tall sycamore, gaunt and picturesque, a sort of giant on guard.

"I had no idea anyone in particular lived in this house," he said to himself. Indeed he had supposed the Sargents the only desirable people left in this part of town. He himself was only a visitor in these days having set up bachelor quarters recently in one of the new apartment houses.

Nothing could have been more stately than the Sargent house, but it struck him to-day as a little cheerless. Not a leaf marred the smooth perfection of the lawn, costly curtains fell in perfect folds before each window; the hall he entered was spacious and beautiful, but not exactly homelike. He had not thought of it before, but the sight of Miss Polly's face had stirred recollections of a different sort of living.

When he reached the staircase, which swept upward in a broad, beautiful curve, a small figure was coming down, her hand on the carved rail, right foot foremost on each polished step, her white dress in relief against the dark wood and the deep toned glass of the great window. At sight of Mr. Sargent a smile shone on the delicate face, but the child did not hurry, in the same deliberate manner she continued her descent, until at the fourth step from the bottom she was captured, swung upon a strong shoulder and carried into a big room furnished with books and a wood fire.

"I saw you from the window, Uncle Will, so I came to meet you," said Mary Grace.

"You are the person I came to see. What have you been doing to-day?"

"I drove to the park with Miss Susanne, but the geese wouldn't swim, so we came home."

"What naughty geese," said Uncle Will, hugging her close as she sat on his knee.

"We went down town too, and I wanted to get out and look in the shop windows, but Miss Susanne said there wasn't anything worth seeing, it was only the Ten Cent Store. But I did want to. I like the Ten Cent Store they have beautiful things. I saw some little girls coming out and they had bought something."

Uncle Will smiled at the earnest tone of Mary Grace. "I'll tell you," he added, "some day you and I will go down town. We won't say a word to Miss Susanne who wouldn't understand our plebeian tastes, but just run away and have a good time shopping."

"Uncle Will!" Mary Grace clasped her hands, ecstasy was on her face, words failed her.

It was after the shopping expedition had been discussed in every detail that she proposed making wishes.

"Well, you go first," said Uncle Will.

Mary Grace looked gravely into the fire considering. "I wish I had a lot of children to play with,—but not Dorothy."

"It does seem a little lonely for you, that's a fact," her uncle remarked.

"A lot of children," she repeated.

"There will be a great many in heaven,
won't there? Isn't ten thousand a great
many?"

"A goodly number I should say," answered Uncle Will; "But what made you think of heaven?"

"Don't you know the song Ailie sings?

""Around the throne of God in heaven
Ten thousand children stand,
Children whose sins are all forgiven,
A holy happy band.
Singing: Glory, Glory,
Glory be to God on high."

She sang it through softly, keeping time with a small finger on the arm of his chair. "I like it," she said,—"so many of them, all singing."

Again Uncle Will drew the little white morsel close to him. He could see himself, a small chap in kilts standing up in Sundayschool singing that same old song. "It's a shame," he said under his breath.

Then Mary Grace suddenly remembered a question she wanted to ask. "Uncle Will, what is slang?"

"A mode of speech more expressive than elegant."

This definition did not help her very much. "Is it wrong?" she asked.

"Not exactly, but it is not considered the thing for young ladies."

Mary Grace lifted serious eyes to her uncle's face, "Uncle Will, did you ever get left?"

Uncle Will laughed,—a hearty laugh that seemed to fill the room; Mary Grace laughed too, although she had not supposed her question to be funny.

"Any number of times, my dear," he told her. "It is a very common experience."

"I think I am left," said Mary Grace.

"Father and mother are gone, and Aunt Clarice is gone, but Miss Susanne says I mustn't say it."

"But you see I am left too, so it is not so bad as it might be, for you and I are left together.

Mary Grace knelt on his knee and clasped her arms around his neck; "I love you, Uncle Will. I wish you would stay here all the time."

"Did you ever hear of larks, Mary Grace?" her uncle asked.

"The lark sings," she repeated reminiscently.

"There is another kind, and you and I are going to have some," he said.

Hours after Mary Grace had gone to sleep, her uncle in the midst of a gay supper party suddenly thought of the little white figure on his knee singing so earnestly that old Sunday-school song.

"Where are you, Mr. Sargent?" laughingly inquired the young lady beside him, "That far-away look in your eyes is not flattering."

For once he was not ready with a reply, and when he did speak it was seriously. "I have come into a new responsibility, Miss Minor," he said. "My brother and his wife, as you know, have gone abroad, and now my sister is called away from home, which leaves me in a manner guard-

ian of my little niece. It rather weighs upon me."

The young lady lifted her white shoulders. "You the guardian of youth, Mr. Sargent," she exclaimed. "How funny!"

It was odd what had given him that feeling of discontent with things in general. As he laid his head on his pillow he found himself saying, "I wish,"— and yet he did not know what he wished, except that it had something to do with the memories aroused by his meeting with Miss Clinton.

CHAPTER III

HOW IT HAPPENED

The most forceful person in Mary Grace's world was Aunt Clarice; she it was who decided matters of diet and education. The loveliest person was Mary Grace's young mother, who hadn't any theories about bringing up children, but was charming to look at and nestle against. Although she hadn't wings she seemed very like an angel, when in some floating, gauzy gown with shining jewels, she bent over her little daughter's bed to kiss her good-night.

Besides Aunt Clarice and mother there was father, a very great person indeed, who on rare occasions played with her, or held

her on his knee. There were other times when he did not wish to be annoyed, and mother would say, "Run away to Ailie, dear."

Father was often heard to remark, "Better do as Clarice says, she knows best."
Aunt Clarice was the oldest member of the Sargent family and her sisters and brothers looked up to her.

There had been some talk of sending Mary Grace to Kindergarten when she was between four and five. Dr. Briggs said she needed companionship, but Aunt Clarice who believed in Kindergarten for the children of the poor was opposed to it for her little niece. One couldn't tell what undesirable children she might meet. The young lady who had opened a private Kindergarten near by, and who at Dr. Briggs's suggestion, called to ask for Mary Grace, retired abashed and overwhelmed by Miss Sargent's clearly stated objections.

So Mary Grace really had no playmates

at all, for the McArthurs and Van Cleeves, who satisfied Aunt Clarice in the matter of social standing, lived too far away for frequent visits, and these when they did occur were not always successful.

"I really think it is better for Mary Grace to play by herself until she is older," her aunt remarked after an unhappy afternoon when the whole household had united in protecting her from the riotous Van Cleeve children.

To be sure there was Ailie, her nurse, who had lived in the family since Uncle Will was a baby, who told fairy stories and sang to her, and did all she could to make up for the lack of child companionship. There were also Jerry and Jane, the stone lions whom Mary Grace had loved ever since she was a tiny tot just able to walk. She had named them herself, and many a long journey had she taken on their smooth backs.

When she was six years old Miss Susanne came. She was a pretty young woman, and carefully trained as a nursery governess, but although she was kind and did her best she was not very fond of children and could not approach Ailie as a playmate.

Uncle Will had not counted for much in Mary Grace's world until a strange combination of circumstances left her almost deserted by her other friends.

The beginning of this was on the day of the luncheon parties. Coming in from a walk with Miss Susanne, Mary Grace wished to stay and talk to Jerry and Jane, but as she had fallen on the gravel and soiled her white stockings Miss Susanne said she was not fit to be seen, and that visitors would be arriving presently. There was nothing for it but to go back out of sight by the greenhouses and wander about pushing her doll carriage while Miss Susanne read a letter.

It was now that Mary Grace made a discovery. Between the Sargent grounds and those adjoining there was a tall iron fence against which grew a hedge, and through a thin place she found she could peep into another yard where three children were playing. The very three she afterward saw coming out of the Ten Cent Store.

They were so busy they did not notice her and as they chattered to each other she soon found out all about it. It was the birthday of one of the dolls who was going to have a party. The table was all set with a big dahlia for a centerpiece and a clover leaf at each plate.

"Dear me, how shall I ever get done in time! I have the children to dress and there's the cake to make," sighed Nansie.

"I'll help you make the cake, Mrs. Green," said Nina, "I'll beat the eggs. Here comes the grocery boy."

This was the chubby boy they called L. B.

who carried a basket on his arm in which were a variety of things. Three sponge cakes, some animal crackers, a big apple and some pink peppermints. While Nina arranged these on the table, Nansie collected the material for her cake making. Mary Grace had never seen anything so interesting.

The flour she used was nice brown earth, the eggs Nina beat so stiff and white, were soap suds. The grocery boy brought some morning glory seeds for raisins, and sand for sugar, and when it was all stirred up in a fluted pan, and gravel sifted over the top, and set in the sun to bake—really it made you hungry. Mary Grace was absorbed.

At the most thrilling moment, when the feast was about to begin, Miss Susanne called. Mary Grace must have her own lunch and be dressed and sent down to see her mother's guests.

Tears and entreaties followed. She didn't want any lunch, and she wouldn't go down to see the ladies. Miss Susanne couldn't understand what made her so naughty.

Mary Grace still felt unhappy an hour later when Miss Susanne left her at the door of the dining-room with the admonition, "Now don't put your finger in your mouth."

She clutched her white frock nervously and looked down at her blue shoes. "Go on," said Miss Susanne, waiting, and she had to go.

The room was a fairy-land of light and color, of flowers and gleaming silver and glass, of lovely ladies in beautiful gowns. Everybody seemed to be talking and nobody saw the little figure hesitating there by the door. Then Mary Grace stole timidly to the side of the pretty young hostess, who put her arm around her,

drawing her close. Thus protected, Mary Grace looked around the glittering circle. Of them all none was so lovely as her golden-haired mother.

Then suddenly she became the center of attention, and that tiresome finger would travel toward her mouth, and the brown eyes seek the tips of the blue shoes.

"Mary Grace, I am ashamed of you,—speak to Mrs. Graves. Yes, this is my baby. Isn't she growing a great girl?"

Mary Grace had to tell how old she was, and whom she loved best, and if she went to dancing school; and was in turn told what a darling she was, what perfect hair and complexion she had, all of which she knew by heart.

"Are you going to take her with you, Mrs. Sargent?" some one asked.

Her mother's clasp tightened as she replied, "No, the journey would be too much for her this time of year, Mr. Sargent thinks. Aunt Clarice will take care of her. Her lips touched her little girl's forehead.

Mary Grace forgot the tiresome ladies and her own shyness. "Mother, are you going away? And won't you take me?"

"Never mind now, darling. I'll tell you about it after a while."

Then Mary Grace knew it was true, and cast herself with a wail of anguish upon her mother. It was dreadful for such a big girl. She must have forgotten she was a Sargent,—so Aunt Clarice said. No doubt she had. There were times when Mary Grace almost wished she wasn't a Sargent. At any rate Watts had to carry her from the room in disgrace.

This was the beginning but by no means the end of her being left. The very week after Mr. and Mrs. Sargent's departure Aunt Clarice was called away by the serious illness of her sister. She couldn't refuse to go and yet she couldn't bear to leave Mary Grace. It was then Uncle Will came to the fore. He said Ailie and Miss Susanne could take care of her and he would come to see her every day. Aunt Clarice did not seem much relieved by his promise, still she had to go, and in the week which had passed since then Mary Grace and her uncle had become very intimate.

Undoubtedly she was taken good care of. If it had not been for the loneliness of it, and Miss Susanne's growing absentmindedness things would have gone very well. As it was, Uncle Will's daily visit became the brightest spot in Mary Grace's existence.

CHAPTER IV

COUSIN POLLY

"Her name is Mary Grace, Cousin Polly," Nina announced from the window where she and Nansie were playing dominoes. "Anne knows her nurse."

"Is she related to Tommy?" Miss Clinton asked going on with her writing.

"Tommy?—Tommy who?" Nina repeated.

Nansie laughed; "I guess she isn't, for her other name is Sargent.

"Then perhaps she is related to my friend."

"Do you mean the man you spoke to on the car? I saw him pass here," said Nansie. Cousin Polly folded her letter and put it in the envelope. "He said he was coming to see me; if he does we will ask about Mary Grace. It is pleasant to know one's neighbors."

It was only two months since the Blanchards had moved into town from their country home. There had been difficulty in finding a house to suit them, for the pretty modern ones up town would not accommodate the old-fashioned furniture Mrs. Blanchard was so proud to own, and the narrow unfenced lots seemed to her another serious objection. "I should never know where the children were," she said, "I want a yard with a fence."

By accident they heard of the Bronson Street house just left vacant by the death of its owner, and although it was rather far down town, in other respects it would suit very well for the present, until they could look about for a lot and build.

It had been an understood thing that as soon as they were settled Cousin Polly was to come and make them a long visit. The children had not seen her since they were babies but they knew a great deal about her.

"We'll do this when Polly comes," they heard their mother and father say, or, "We'll ask Polly about it." They had been told to keep their new dresses nice till Cousin Polly came, and when they were cross, were reminded that Cousin Polly didn't like naughty children. Altogether her visit was looked forward to as a most important event.

Before they were fairly settled in their new home baby Charles was taken ill, and when Miss Clinton did come she at once bundled the baby and his worn out mother off with Mr. Blanchard for a change and rest, while she took charge of the house and the little girls, Nina and Nannette.

It didn't take the children any time at all to find out that they liked Cousin Polly. She was so full of energy and happiness she had much the effect of a breezy, bright day upon your spirits.

They discovered before long, however, that if Cousin Polly was cheerful herself she also expected other people to be the same. She said if you wanted to be cross and fret, very well, but you must do it alone. And who on earth ever wanted to be cross alone?

One morning Nina came down with a frown on her face, and only half responded to Cousin Polly's good-morning. Her breakfast did not please her. Anne put too much cream on her oatmeal and her biscuit wasn't hot.

At last Cousin Polly spoke; "Anne is going to take your plate to the pantry, Nina. You can finish your breakfast there."

"No, she shan't," Nina cried, holding fast to her plate. "I won't eat in the pantry."

Before she knew it she was being led from the room by a firm hand, while Anne followed with the plate, and Nansie looked on with big eyes. When Nina was naughty at breakfast mamma always thought she wasn't well.

When Nina threw herself on the floor and said she wouldn't eat anything, Cousin Polly said she need not if she did not wish to, but that she and Nansie wanted to enjoy their breakfast; then she went back to the dining-room. Nina began to feel ill. She wished mamma was at home, she wouldn't let her go without any breakfast. Cousin Polly was mean.

But she couldn't make herself believe a story. Cousin Polly wasn't mean, and—well in about five minutes a mournful voice

asked at the dining-room door, "May I come in now?"

"The price of admission is one smile," Miss Clinton answered, and Nina paid it in spite of herself, and ran to Cousin Polly, who hugged her, and the storm was over.

There was one particularly delightful thing about Cousin Polly so the children thought. She wrote stories—not only wrote them but told them, and made funny little rhymes to order while you waited. And she promised when she wrote another book it should have "To Nina and Nansie" on one of the front leaves so that every one would know it was their very own. They wished she would begin it at once they were so anxious to see it.

They had been talking about it over the dominoes, and now Nansie came and stood by Cousin Polly while she sealed and stamped her letter. "I wish we could be in a story," she said.

"Well, why not? Perhaps you are and don't know it," Miss Clinton said. "If I were going to write it down it would be like this:" Nannette and Nina were playing dominoes in the window. These little girls were sisters, Nina was eight and Nansie seven years old, and they both had rosy cheeks and bright eyes, and one had curly hair and the other hadn't. In the same room their Cousin Polly was trying to write a letter,—not an easy matter, because the children wanted to talk about the little girl who lived next door. But after a while the letter was finished and their Cousin Polly said, 'Let's put on our things and walk around the square and mail it, and on the way we'll stop and ask for the sick mother of Little Boy Brown."

"Why, Cousin Polly, it is exactly like a real story! Do go on," the children cried, dancing about like jumping-jacks in their delight.

Miss Clinton laughed: "We have brought it up to date and shall have to wait a few minutes for something else to happen. Shall we mail the letter?"

Nina and Nansie ran off to get their hats and coats, charmed at the thought of being in a story. When they started out, one on each side of Cousin Polly, they held their heads high and walked with dignity. They were not just ordinary little girls any longer.

It was a tall three-story house across the street at which they stopped to ask for Little Boy Brown's mother. Cousin Polly had discovered—it was a way she had—that Mrs. Brown was related to somebody she knew very well at home, besides she said, such a chubby good-tempered little boy was a recommendation to anybody.

Mrs. Brown had been ill some time, almost ever since the Blanchards had been in the neighborhood, and so L. B. had

fallen into the habit of wandering about the block in search for amusement. He had made friends with Nina and Nansie one day when their kitten ran away, and he caught it and brought it back. He was such a well-mannered little fellow that Mrs. Blanchard made no objection to his playing with the children. Everybody called him L. B., and when Cousin Polly asked his name no one knew it. She decided at once that L. B. must stand for Little Boy. Little Boy Blue, why not Little Boy Brown? When it was discovered that his real name was Lawrence Barret, Cousin Polly said it was too late, she should always call him Little Boy.

The Browns lived in a boarding-house, and not one of the nicest sort. The front door was dingy and the steps far from clean; even the little girls felt the cheerlessness of the parlor into which they were shown. Miss Clinton sent up her card and

Mr. Brown and L. B. came down to see them.

"Hello!" said Little Boy Brown to Nina and Nansie, "My mamma is going to the *Infernary*."

"I heard Mrs. Brown was worse, and on the strength of being a friend of some of her friends, and because we are so fond of your small boy, I have come to ask if there isn't something I can do," Cousin Polly said to Mr. Brown, who though he was tall and thin and anxious looking, yet bore an amusing likeness to his son.

"You are very kind," he began.-

"I'd like to be," she interrupted, "if you will let me."

As she stood there so strong and wholesome, with a pretty fresh color in her face, she seemed the very picture of comfort. It was not possible to doubt her sincerity.

"Thank you," Mr. Brown faltered. "My wife is going to the Infirmary this after-

noon. I hope—I mean I don't think there is anything. She is anxious about Lawrence, but I tell her he will get on very well."

"Then let him stay with us. I am taking care of these little girls while their mother is away, and I'll be glad to have him. You would like to come and stay with us, wouldn't you, Little Boy Brown?"

There was no doubt about that part of it. "Father, let me!" L. B. begged.

"You are most kind, but it would be asking too much," said Mr. Brown.

"I am doing the asking," replied Cousin Polly, "so let's consider it settled. Tell his mother I'll take good care of him."

Mr. Brown surrendered to Cousin Polly's friendliness. "If he may stay with you during the day it will be a great weight off my mind. At night of course I can take care of him."

"Goody, I'm glad," Little Boy Brown

exclaimed, holding Miss Clinton's hand and looking up into her face with honest admiration.

It takes a long time to get around the square when you make a number of stops. There were some things to be ordered at the grocery store in the next street, and the gold-fish in the drug-store window were there of course to be looked at. Cousin Polly said she was afraid her letter would not get off that evening.

The mail-box when at last they reached it, had been freshly painted in silver paint, and there was a new card with the hours for collection on it which Nansie insisted on having read to her, so she might know when the letter would be taken up.

They were just turning away from the mail-box when they saw coming along the street a tall man and a very small girl. It took only one second to decide that they were Mr. Sargent and Mary Grace.

Mary Grace was talking earnestly to her uncle and he was looking down into her upturned face, so they neither of them saw Cousin Polly and Nina and Nansie till they were almost upon them.

"I am glad to meet my neighbors," Miss Clinton said. "I have just discovered that you live next door."

Mr. Sargent said he too had made the discovery only yesterday, and that he had not dreamed he was so fortunate.

"And is this little Miss Mouse?" Miss Clinton asked, smiling down on Mary Grace who moved closer to her uncle and looked at her toes.

"Can't you speak to Miss Clinton?"
Uncle Will asked. "Here are the very little girls you were telling me about."

Nina and Nansie were in a flutter of delight at meeting Mary Grace.

"Mayn't she come and walk with us, Mr. Sargent?" Nansie asked. "Yes, Mary Grace, come and walk with us," Nina urged.

Mary Grace seemed about to refuse, but Uncle Will put her hand in Nansie's and Nina took possession of the other one, and there she was walking along the street between them while Miss Clinton and Mr. Sargent followed.

Mary Grace looked straight ahead, shyly, Nina and Nansie meantime bending eyes of ardent admiration upon her.

"Do you know you live next door to us?" Nansie asked.

Mary Grace nodded.

"And our Cousin Polly used to know your uncle a long time ago. Won't you ask your mother to let you come to see us?" said Nina.

"She has gone away," Mary Grace answered, then plucking up courage she added, "I'll ask Uncle Will."

Behind them Cousin Polly was saying,

"How it brings back old times to see you, Will." Though she smiled there was sadness underneath.

"I often think of those happy holidays at your house, Miss Polly. How good you were to us, and how you used to scold us."

"You were dear boys. I had high hopes of you both in those days."

"I have never ceased to miss Arthur, Miss Polly," Mr. Sargent said earnestly.

"Nor have I," something glistened in the eyes she lifted to his for a moment.

"Somehow I lost heart and interest in things after he died," Mr. Sargent added.

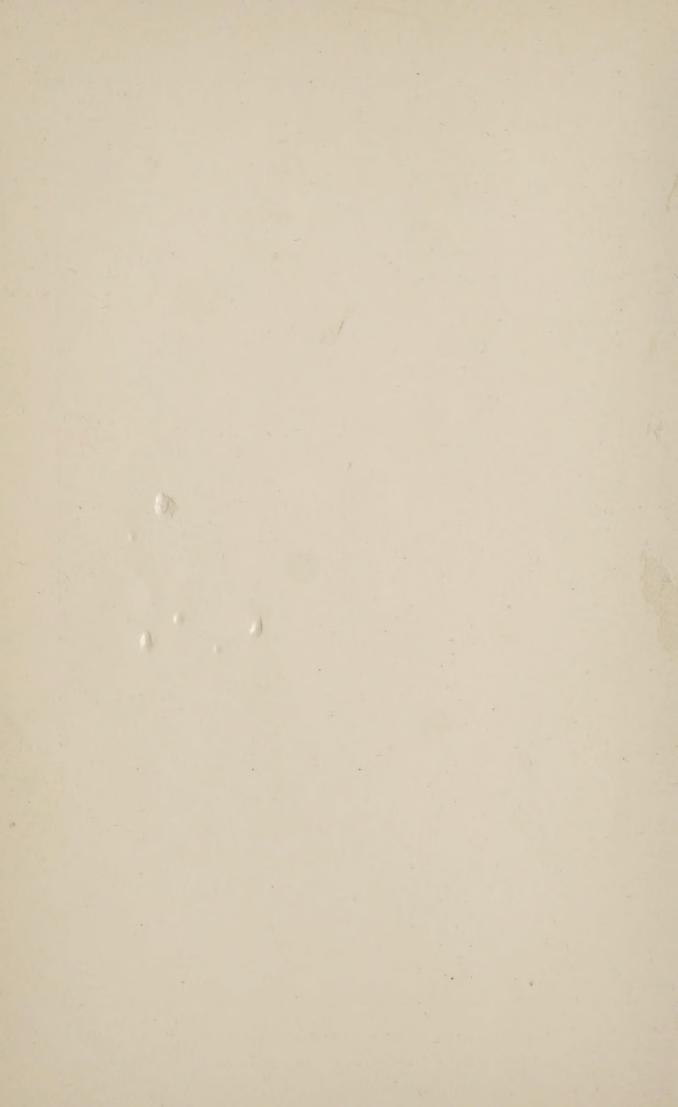
"I don't like to have you say that, Will. It seems not fair to Arthur."

"Cousin Polly, can't Mary Grace be in the story?" Nina turned round to ask.

"Why certainly. We'll say: 'And while they were out walking they met Mary wrace.'"



MARY GRACE LOOKED STRAIGHT AHEAD, SHYLY.



"I should like to know if you didn't meet me too?" Mr. Sargent said.

"I am not sure that you deserve to be in our story," Cousin Polly answered severely.

4

CHAPTER V

THE PLOT THICKENS

MISS SUSANNE was firm. Miss Sargent had cautioned her not to let Mary Grace look through the fence at the children next door. She would hold her responsible if the child made undesirable acquaintances.

Uncle Will was highly incensed. Circumstances altered cases he contended. His sister did not know the Blanchards, he did,—or at least he knew Miss Polly. These were nice little children, and Mary Grace needed companionship. He would write to his sister and explain.

Miss Susanne assented meekly. In the meantime she would carry out Miss Sargent's commands.

Upon reflection Mr. Sargent decided that

open war with Mary Grace's governess was not desirable. It would not be long now till his sister's return.

It really seemed as if some ironical fate decreed that since Mr. Sargent wished to manage things he should have his fill of responsibility, for now something else happened. Miss Susanne was called home, and Aunt Clarice broke her ankle and had to stay where she was.

That was a day of excitement. Mary Grace was all but forgotten, while Ailie and one of the maids helped Miss Susanne pack her trunk. It was very strange to see Miss Susanne cry. Mary Grace hopped about on one foot enjoying the novelty of the occasion until Ailie asked her if she wasn't sorry for Miss Susanne. This embarrassed her a little and she took Wilhelmina, her doll who was named for the Queen of Holland, and went down-stairs.

In the hall Watts was polishing the big

mirror. Mary Grace seated herself on the bottom step to look on.

"Watts, did you know that Miss Susanne was going away?" she asked.

"Looks like everybody's going away," Watts said.

"Everybody but me," this with a deep sigh.

"We'd have to close up if you was to go," Watts remarked.

"Yes, I think I'll stay and keep the house open," Mary Grace spoke with a languid importance so like Miss Clarice, Watts stifled a laugh.

"Miss Susanne has to go 'cause somebody's dead, and maybe she can't come back. She said she didn't want to leave me, but Uncle Will said 'course she must go,' and, he's coming to stay here all the time and take care of me."

Down the stairs hurried Miss Susanne and fell upon Mary Grace with tears and

kisses. Ailie followed with her bag. Mary Grace stood watching till the carriage disappeared, then she turned to find her uncle behind her.

"Well, Mary Grace, the plot thickens," he said. "We continue to be left."

Mary Grace seized his hand. "Are you going to eat supper with me, Uncle Will?" she asked.

"Sure and I wonder what will be happening next?" Ailie said.

"I trust you'll not break your neck or anything, Ailie," Uncle Will replied, then he and Mary Grace went to the library to write to Aunt Clarice.

It was not easy to decide what to say. Poor Miss Sargent was so distressed at having to be away perhaps six weeks longer, it seemed cruel to tell her about Miss Susanne. Her brother decided not to mention it this time, but to break it to her by degrees.

Mary Grace also wrote a letter, that is

she printed it and signed her name in writing. All she said was: "Dear Auntie, I am sorry you hurt your foot. Uncle Will is good to me. I love you." But many a long letter fails to say as much.

While they were busy over their letters, and Wilhelmina, seated in one corner of the divan studied the portrait of Mary Grace's grandfather on the opposite wall, a little old lady was ushered in. Such a quaint old lady, with white curls on either side of her face, which was framed by a close-fitting black bonnet.

Mary Grace surveyed her with wide open eyes, as her uncle rose, exclaiming "Aunt Margaret! I don't know when I have seen you!"

"It has been a long time, William," the old lady said, "and as I like occasionally to hear something of my sister's children I came up town to-day on purpose. They tell me Clarice is away."

"Yes, everybody is away but Mary Grace and me—Mary Grace, come and speak to Aunt Margaret. This is Marshall's little girl."

Mary Grace stood beside Aunt Margaret her eyes glued to the white curls. The old lady kissed her cheek and said she was growing to look like her grandmother. Then she asked her how old she was.

Mary Grace said she was seven, and then, her gaze still on the curls she added, "Do you put them up on kids?"

"What does she mean?" asked Aunt Margaret, but Uncle Will had no idea, and Mary Grace taking refuge within his arm was too abashed to explain. She felt an interest in this new aunt however, and listened to the conversation.

"No, I had not heard it," Aunt Margaret said. "I am sorry about Clarice. I seldom see any of you, William, in these days,

I am not fashionable enough. I am just an old-time Methodist."

"You know my sister is a very busy woman," Uncle Will began.

"You need not apologize, William, I am not hurt. It is natural enough. Of course I wish it was different, but I realize I am only a plain old woman."

Uncle Will leaned forward with his arm on his knee, and a very winning look in his eyes. "Aunt Margaret," he said, "I speak only for myself. I have allowed some things which I really value deeply to be crowded out of my life by matters of less account. I used to love to go to your house. I have not forgotten the fruit-cake you used to give me. I should still like to go, and I mean to, very soon."

"There will be some fruit-cake for you if you still like it. Don't say any more, William. You were a nice boy, and I am not going to quarrel with you."

"They talked on and forgot Mary Grace who joined Wilhelmina on the divan and showed her a picture-book. The next thing she knew Uncle Will was saying, "It is a great deal to ask, but it will be a tremendous relief if you will," then he added, "Mary Grace, Aunt Margaret is going to stay with us for a while.

"Mary Grace and I have had so many blows lately we need a little diversion," Mr. Sargent remarked to Miss Clinton that night, "so we want you and the little girls to come to supper to-morrow evening."

"I'm sure we'll be delighted. May we bring our guest? Little Boy Brown is staying with us."

"Certainly, the more the merrier. Come early. We dine—or take supper I mean—at half-past six."

When he told Mary Grace about it, he said, "Now you know neither mother or auntie is here to act as hostess, so it rests

with you to make our guests have a pleasant time."

Mary Grace thought about it seriously. The idea of being hostess pleased her. She did not need to be told that a hostess does not put her finger in her mouth or look at her toes. So it happened when Miss Clinton and the children entered the stately drawing-room they found a charming old lady with silver curls and a white kerchief over her black silk gown, and a dignified little maiden in white with a big blue bow on her hair who came to meet them, and said good-evening and shook hands in a manner worthy of any number of Sargents.

It was Cousin Polly who didn't behave properly, but in the midst of it, exclaimed, "Dear little Miss Mouse," and picking her up sat down in the nearest chair and hugged her.

Mary Grace did not mind very much, Cousin Polly's lap was so comfortable, and Nina and Nansie and Little Boy Brown came and stood as close as possible. "A little quartette," Miss Polly called them.

Presently Mary Grace's lips puckered into a demure smile, she pointed a finger at L. B. "He was the grocery man," she said.

"Why yes, he was, how did you know?"
Nina asked.

From this moment sociability reigned. While Miss Clinton talked to Aunt Margaret and Uncle Will, Mary Grace took the children up-stairs to see her play-house. On the way she told them about peeping through the fence at the party, and Nina and Nansie told her how they pretended she was a princess, and how they saw her one day sitting in the carriage in front of the Ten Cent Store.

The play-house was very much admired, but Little Boy Brown thought the toboggan slide was best. There was so much to see Ailie could hardly get them down to supper.

Mary Grace was so happy she could not eat. "My wish is coming true, Uncle Will," she announced looking around the table. "I have a lot of children to play with."

"Not quite ten thousand, that was the number you mentioned, I think," said her uncle.

"That is heaven," Mary Grace replied gravely, making them laugh.

"I am fond of children," said Cousin Polly, "but ten thousand is not just my idea of heaven."

"Nina and Nansie and L. B. are enough for now," said Mary Grace.

Certainly they behaved so well they were not any too many. Mr. Sargent said he had not had such a good time in years. Aunt Margaret said so too, shaking her curls approvingly. It was the kind of a

tea-party a plain Methodist lady liked, and after supper was over she gathered the children around her and told them about the time long, long ago when she was a little girl.

Cousin Polly and Uncle Will strolled about the spacious rooms so full of rare and beautiful things. "And this is what you have been used to all your life," she said. "I wonder what you are doing to make up for it."

CHAPTER VI.

STARS.

In the quiet night-time,
Far away so far,
Clear and fair and steadfast
Shines a little star.

Just a little starbeam,
Yet so softly bright,
It cheers a tired traveler
Through a dreary night.

Happy little faces,
Eyes that shine with love,
Make a bit of brightness
Like the stars above.

Do you hear the message From far away so far? Just to keep on shining Like a little star.

These are the verses Cousin Polly wrote that rainy Sunday afternoon. It was the dreariest day imaginable. It poured and

poured, Uncle Will was out and Ailie had a headache which kept her from being as cheerful as usual. Aunt Margaret had been very kind, she read Mary Grace a story out of her church paper and told her about Uncle Will when he was a little boy not any older than she was. But after lunch there was a whole long afternoon and nothing to do. Aunt Margaret could take a nap, but Mary Grace did not get sleepy in the daytime.

She stood at the window looking out on the lawn, very green and wet. She could see Jerry and Jane crouching patiently beside the gate, the water streaming from their backs. Mary Grace felt that she would be quite happy if she could have them in the house to play with. Once, when she was much younger, she had cried for them and was with difficulty convinced that stone lions cannot be made house pets of for several reasons.

She wondered what Nina and Nansie and Little Boy Brown were doing. Since her tea-party she had been over to see them, and as she told Uncle Will, it was nice at their house. Aunt Clarice and Miss Susanne were mistaken about the manners. They had much better manners than Dorothy and Charlie. Ailie said so, and she and Anne had become good friends.

Mary Grace turned to her picture-book and then back to the window again. "Oh, Ailie, I wish I had something to do. Can't I have some chocolate?" she asked.

At this moment the telephone bell rang and Ailie went to answer it. Mary Grace followed her. This is what she heard:

"Yes, ma'm, this is Ailie. I'm afraid it's raining too hard. Yes, ma'm, she's well, but I don't know what Miss Clarice would say."

"Ailie, is it Miss Polly? does she want

me? Let me go." Mary Grace jumped up and down anxiously

Ailie motioned to her to be quiet, and Mary Grace subsided.

"Yes, ma'm, I'll see if Watts is here. I don't think it will hurt her." Ailie now hung up the receiver with great deliberation and looked at Mary Grace. "Sure I'm crazy to be thinking of it," she said.

Mary Grace clasped her hands. The rain came with a sweep against the pane. "Well, if Watts is here—" said Ailie.

Fortunately Watts was there; and Mary Grace in a quiver of excitement must have on a clean dress and another bow on her hair and then be rolled up like a mummy, in a shawl. Watts took her in one arm and the umbrella in the other, and Ailie watched from the door as they started out.

Mary Grace had never been out in the rain before. It was a wonderful expe-

rience. She would have clapped her hands for joy only she couldn't get them out of the shawl. How the rain dashed against the umbrella, what a noise it made, how pleasant the damp air felt on her face, and how safe she was, held in Watts' strong arm!

She laughed joyfully. "It's fun, Watts," she said.

"The country do be needing it bad," Watts remarked.

As they passed, Mary Grace waved a greeting to Jerry and Jane. She was sure they liked the rain. Then in about two minutes they were at the Blanchards' door.

It was opened by Anne who was followed by Cousin Polly and the children, and what a laughing and exclaiming went on till Mary Grace was unrolled and stood safe and sound on her own feet again.

"I came over in the rain, and there

didn't nobody carry me, neither," L. B. observed, looking at Mary Grace with much superiority.

"That is very bad grammar, L. B.," said Nina.

With Cousin Polly's arm around her, Mary Grace was ushered into the sittingroom, while the other three danced something like a war-dance around her.

"Cousin Polly, may we show her the book?" Nansie asked.

"'Cause she is going to be in it," Nina added.

Mary Grace had already heard of the story Cousin Polly made out of the happenings of every day, telling it each evening as if it were the chapter out of a book. The children thought it such fun to be in a story that Nansie wished it might be written down for father and mother. After thinking it over Miss Clinton said she would try it, and then they would

have the book to remember her by when she went home.

So now Mary Grace must hear how they went down the very next day to buy a book to put the story in; how the clerk brought out dozens to choose from, and L. B. wanted one with roses on the cover, and Nansie liked a green one, and Nina and Cousin Polly preferred one bound in red leather, which was finally decided on. Then Cousin Polly had to divide the way home into three equal parts so they could each have the honor of carrying the purchase the same distance.

Mary Grace thought it all very amusing and wished she could have been with them. She looked with deep interest at this most important volume on the first page of which was written: "The Book of Happy Days."

[&]quot;Isn't that a nice name?" said Nina.

[&]quot;Because you know, Cousin Polly says

only bright, pleasant days can go into it. If it is a bad day the page will be blank," Nansie explained.

Mary Grace looked toward the window.

"Nansie doesn't mean bad weather outside," Cousin Polly said, "but cross, selfish, ill-tempered days,—the kind we don't intend to have."

It really did seem impossible, seeing them now, that such days could ever come. They sat in a row on the big sofa and had Sunday-school. Cousin Polly played on the piano and they sang hymns, beginning with "Father, we thank thee," and ending with the song with the many children in it, as Mary Grace called her favorite.

After this they talked about the Golden Text on the lesson paper: "Let your light so shine." They thought of all the many kinds of light. Electric-light, gaslight, candle-light, lamplight, sunlight, moonlight were mentioned.

"I can think of another kind of light," Cousin Polly said.

"I know," cried Little Boy Brown,
"Twilight."

This made them laugh, and Miss Clinton said that was not the kind she meant. Nansie then suggested firelight, and L. B. after deep thought said "torchlight." It was Mary Grace's gentle little voice that added "Starlight."

"That is it," said Cousin Polly, "It wouldn't do to forget the stars."

She told them about the Lord Jesus who came into the world to be a light. Who went about loving and helping people, comforting them when they were sad, healing them when they were sick, until wherever he went it was like a light shining in darkness, and one day, she said, he gathered his disciples around him on a hillside and talked to them, and among other things, he told them that they too must be

lights just as he was; must love people and try to help them, "And so the message comes to us, to let our light shine," she added.

"And when we are good, and love each other and aren't selfish, then we are lights," said Nina.

"I'd like to be a star," Mary Grace said.

"Let's all be stars," suggested Nansie.

"Dear me, how bright I shall be this evening with four stars shining on me," Miss Clinton said gaily. Then she got out some cardboard and gilt paper—she always seemed to have such things about—and cut out and made four five-pointed golden stars. On the back of each she printed: "Kind thoughts, kind words, kind deeds," these she said were starbeams.

When Uncle Will came in a little later he found them all decorated with stars hung on ribbons around their necks. "We are stars," Mary Grace announced, dancing up and down.

"What, all of you? I never before met so many at a time. I'm overcome. Miss Polly, may I stay to supper?"

"If you will be content with bread and cheese; the cook is out."

"Indeed I will, and I'll help clean up."

"Much you know about cleaning up. However, Anne is here. I have been hearing things about you, Will," Miss Polly added, presently.

"What sort of things?" he asked.

"That you are a social lion of the most exclusive variety, or words to that effect."

Mr. Sargent shrugged his shoulders. "Was it a shock?" he inquired.

"I told her," said Miss Clinton, "that she was mistaken."

"Thank you."

"If I thought it was true I should not let you stay to supper," she said.

- "Thank you again."
- "To prove to her how mistaken I'm going to ask a favor."
 - "It is granted."
- "Rash young man, there is a lecture next week which I wish to attend."
- "I'll take you if it should turn out to be on the colonization of the moon," said Mr. Sargent.
- "It happens to be a trifle more practical than that," laughed Miss Polly.

Just here supper was announced, and Miss Polly made something delicious in a chafing-dish to supplement the bread and cheese.

When Mary Grace and Uncle Will went home the rain was over and the stars were out.

"Uncle Will, don't you think it is nice to be a star?" Mary Grace asked. "If you are kind and help people then you are shining." When Cousin Polly made the record of that afternoon in the Book of Happy Days, she added the verses about the little star.

CHAPTER VII

NELLIE

EVERYBODY of course knew the postman, a round-faced, black-eyed little man, with a cheery, hearty manner. Mary Grace often watched for him and when he came up the walk blowing his whistle she would run down to see what he had brought. At first she used to peep out from behind Watts or Ailie, but after a while she grew brave enough to take the letters and papers from him herself. He always seemed sorry when he hadn't a letter for her, and quite triumphant when he could give her one with a foreign stamp.

To Mary Grace he was just one of the many persons who served her, like Watts

and Ailie and the rest, and she was rather surprised to find he had a name. Besides being the postman he was Mr. Meguire and more astonishing still he had a little girl.

It was Nansie and Nina who told her about it. They and L. B. were great friends with the postman, but even they had not heard about Nellie till Cousin Polly came.

Cousin Polly had lived long enough, and kept her eyes wide open enough, to find out that people are not only postmen, or grocery men, or clerks or seamstresses, but are usually fathers or mothers or brothers or sisters besides, and she had a way—she couldn't have told how—of finding out about this side of their lives.

She was attracted by the postman's cheery manner and one morning when she went down to sign for a registered letter, in response to his good-morning, she asked if everybody at his house was well. A

cloud passed over the smiling face as he answered, "All except my little girl."

Cousin Polly of course asked about her, and learned that she had fallen down-stairs a few months before and hurt her back so seriously she had not walked since. They hoped she would get well, but it would be a long time, the postman said.

This was the beginning, and it was not long before Miss Clinton knew all about the Meguires. They lived in a small frame house only a few blocks away, and there were eight of them counting the postman and his wife. Three children younger and two older than Nellie, and all sturdy and rosy, and as clean as their anxious little mother could keep them. Cousin Polly quite fell in love with them, especially with the patient invalid who was just Nina's age.

The children were deeply interested in Nellie, and Cousin Polly promised to take them to see her some day.

"Do you think Nellie would like to be a star?" Nansie asked.

Cousin Polly said she thought she was a star, because she was so patient and brave, but she was sure she would like to have a visit from some other stars.

"And couldn't you make her a star like ours to wear?" Nina said.

Of course the star was made, and one afternoon Cousin Polly with her two small cousins and Mary Grace went to call on the postman's family. Little Boy Brown had gone to see his mother, who was getting better.

Ailie was sure Miss Clarice would not like Mary Grace to visit the Meguires, but Aunt Margaret said she thought Miss Clinton could be trusted. Aunt Margaret liked Cousin Polly. So Mary Grace set out in a flutter of delight. She was having so many new experiences these days.

It was fun to walk along the street with Nina and Nansie, stopping when they turned the corner, to look in the window of the grocery-store which was filled with red apples, yellow oranges and grape fruit and other ornamental eatables. Mary Grace did not feel in the least shy to-day, but talked as fast as the others.

They each carried something to Nellie. Nina had a book, Nansie a paper doll, and Mary Grace a great red rose which she took from the tall vase in the library. Aunt Clarice sent roses to sick people, and it had not occurred to her to give away any of her own toys.

In the door of the grocery sat a stately gray cat, and Mary Grace lost her heart to him when, following Nansie's example, she ventured to stroke his head with her little white gloved hand, and in response he arched his back and purred.

"Auntie won't let me have a pussy cat

'cause she says they scratch," she remarked wistfully.

"I was under the impression we were going to see the postman's little girl, but I see I was mistaken, it was Mr. Tompkin's cat," Cousin Polly remarked gravely after several minutes had passed, spent in fervent admiration.

This made them laugh, and they said good-by to the cat and started on, arriving at the Meguires' without further detention. Mary Grace thought it a funny place to live in. It did not seem much larger than her play-house, and not half so pretty, but nothing could have been prettier than Nellie, lying in her white bed, with her sweet blue eyes, and dark rings of hair around her pale little face.

Nellie's bed was in a room next to the kitchen, so her mother could take care of her and attend to other things besides. This seemed odd, for when Mary Grace

had measles Ailie and Aunt Clarice did nothing but wait on her and amuse her.

"Here's Miss Clinton and some nice little girls come to see you, Nellie," Mrs. Meguire said, ushering them in.

Nellie smiled at Cousin Polly, and answered her questions shyly, but her eyes were on the three little girls who stood gazing at her so gravely.

"I have brought these little girls to see you because you have only boys here at your house," Cousin Polly said, and then she introduced them.

"I have a picture-book for you, Nellie," Nina said, laying it on the bed.

"And here's a paper doll," added Nansie.

Mary Grace couldn't find her voice at all, but she came close to the bedside and held out the rose. Nellie dropped the doll and took it in both hands, "O, Mamma, see the lovely rose!" she cried.

"She always did love flowers better than

anything," Mrs. Meguire explained to Miss Clinton. "Yes, my dearie, it is pretty, and so are the other things they have brought you."

But Nellie could think of nothing but the rose. Presently she reached out and put a small finger on Mary Grace's shoulder; they smiled at each other; "I like you," Nellie said.

"Truly—can't you walk? not a bit?" Mary Grace asked.

Nellie shook her head. "But I'm going to get well," she added.

"Don't you like me too?" Nina asked; Nellie nodded, "I like you all," she said, but it was plain that Mary Grace and the rose had the first place.

After a while her mother persuaded her to have the rose put in water, and then she became interested in the paper doll, and over trying on its dresses they grew very sociable. Nansie told her about the stars

and Nina said the verses for her, and Nellie said she wanted to be one too, and was very much pleased when Cousin Polly took out the gold star she had made and hung it round her neck.

Besides Nellie they saw three round-faced, chubby boys, the youngest only a baby, who looked so much like their father that Cousin Polly called them the little postmen. The two older boys delivered papers in the afternoons, and would not be home till dark.

"Is Nellie a little postgirl?" Mary Grace asked on the way home.

"Did you know the postman had a little girl?" she said to Uncle Will that night. "Such a many children and such a little house," she added. "Don't you like little children, Uncle Will?"

The conversation was chiefly on Mary Grace's side this evening, but she was quite equal to the occasion. She told all about

their visit to Nellie and even brought in the gray cat; then she remarked without any connection at all, "Uncle Will, Anne asked Ailie what you did, and Ailie said you didn't do anything but take care of what you had. Don't you?"

Uncle Will replied rather impatiently that Ailie knew nothing about it.

This was the evening of the lecture to which Mr. Sargent had promised to take Miss Clinton. He had made no further inquiries about it and he was half sorry he had promised to go. As he acknowledged to Miss Polly, he was feeling a little bored with life.

"You need to be waked up. Nobody is bored who is wide awake," she responded.

This did not please Mr. Sargent. He considered himself extremely wide awake, and he showed his displeasure by becoming silent.

Miss Polly asked if he knew where he

was going, and told him it was a meeting of the Civic League, but this did not enlighten him much.

It was not a large gathering, and Mr. Sargent was surprised to see a number of persons whom he knew, and one thing he noticed was that everybody seemed greatly in earnest about something.

There were several speakers, men and women, who talked simply and forcibly about the way to make and enforce laws for the protection of little children who, instead of being sent to school, worked in factories and stores and sold papers and chewing-gum on the streets at night.

It was nothing really new. He had known it all before, vaguely, but had never thought much about it. It had not seemed to be a thing he could help. To-night he learned that he might do something if he would. He thought of Mary Grace's question. "You like little children, don't

you?" Perhaps Ailie had been right. He had been standing idle, taking care of what he had.

When an opportunity was given for questions Mr. Sargent asked several, and when the meeting was over he put his name down as a member of the League.

"How did you know about this, Miss Polly?" he asked on the way home.

"Why, Child Labor and Compulsory Education are the subjects of the day. I have done some work for the cause at home, and I happen to know some people here who are pushing it. I am pleased if it interested you," was Miss Clinton's reply.

"I am glad you took me to the meeting. You were right about my not being awake," Mr. Sargent said.

Miss Clinton laughed. "At least you were not very sound asleep, Will."

CHAPTER VIII

SHOPPING

"Just think, Watts, she can't walk at all. Suppose I couldn't walk!" Mary Grace all dressed for going out, sat in one of the deep library chairs with her feet straight before her, trying to imagine how it would seem not to be able to get down and run away, whenever she pleased.

"I'd have to carry you I reckon," Watts answered brushing the hearth very deliberately and looking over his shoulder.

"Would you carry me everywhere I wanted to go? That would be fun. I don't believe Nellie has anybody to carry her, 'cause the postman is too busy.

Watts, did you know I was going shopping?"

"Is that so?" said Watts, still brushing.

"Yes, and Ailie isn't going either,—just me and Uncle Will. Perhaps I'll bring you something, Watts." Mary Grace took out her purse with the gold monogram on it.

"That's mighty kind of you," said Watts.

"I wished and wished I could go shopping, but Miss Susanne wouldn't let me."

"But now you are going."

"Yes, all my wishes are coming true; I am going to be in a story too, Watts. Miss Polly is going to put us all in it, and we are stars. When you are good and don't cry when your hair is curled, and if you do things for people, then you are a star. Don't you want to hear me say the verses Miss Polly wrote?"

Mary Grace recited them with great

earnestness, but before she had quite finished Uncle Will called her.

"Just to keep on shining Like a little star."

"Good-by, Watts," and away she ran.

"If Mary Grace was having new experiences these days so was her uncle. Rather to his surprise he had discovered that for a long time he had been doing the same things over and over; meeting the same people, talking about the same things, eating the same sort of dinners, and that there were other people, other subjects and even other dinners in the world, at least worth investigating.

This afternoon he felt he was striking out in a new direction and being rather original and independent, all because he was taking his small niece to the Ten Cent Store. The eager delight in Mary Grace's face was enough to repay him, however, for a much greater sacrifice.

The same boy, with what looked like the same dirty face, was opening and closing the door as on the day when Mary Grace sat in the carriage and imagined herself going in.

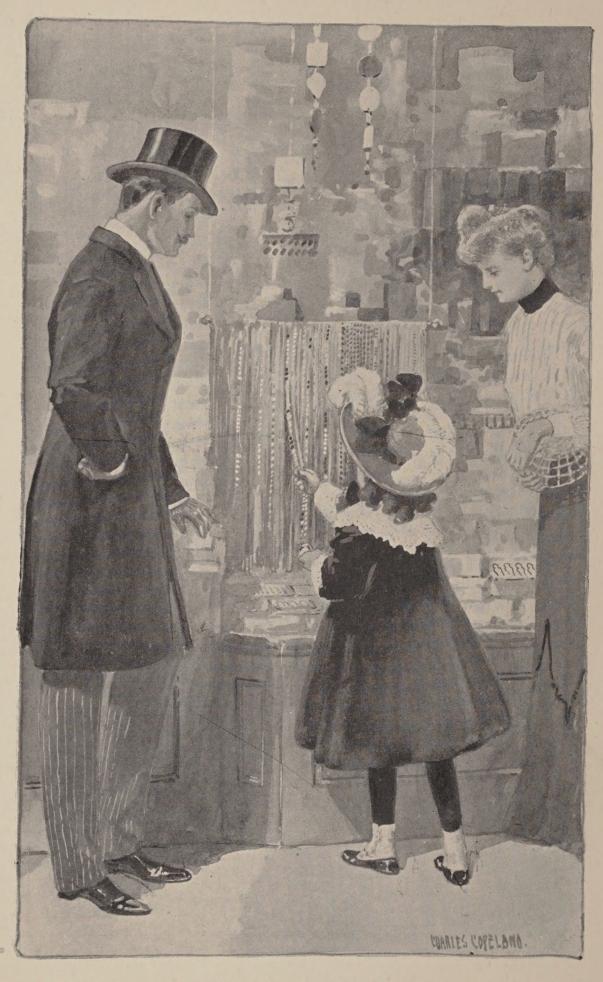
Mr. Sargent looked about with interest, it seemed incredible that so many articles, at the price of ten cents each, could be brought together. He really felt impelled to buy something himself.

Mary Grace walked slowly down the aisle looking with all her eyes. At length she paused. "I want one of these silver baskets," she said.

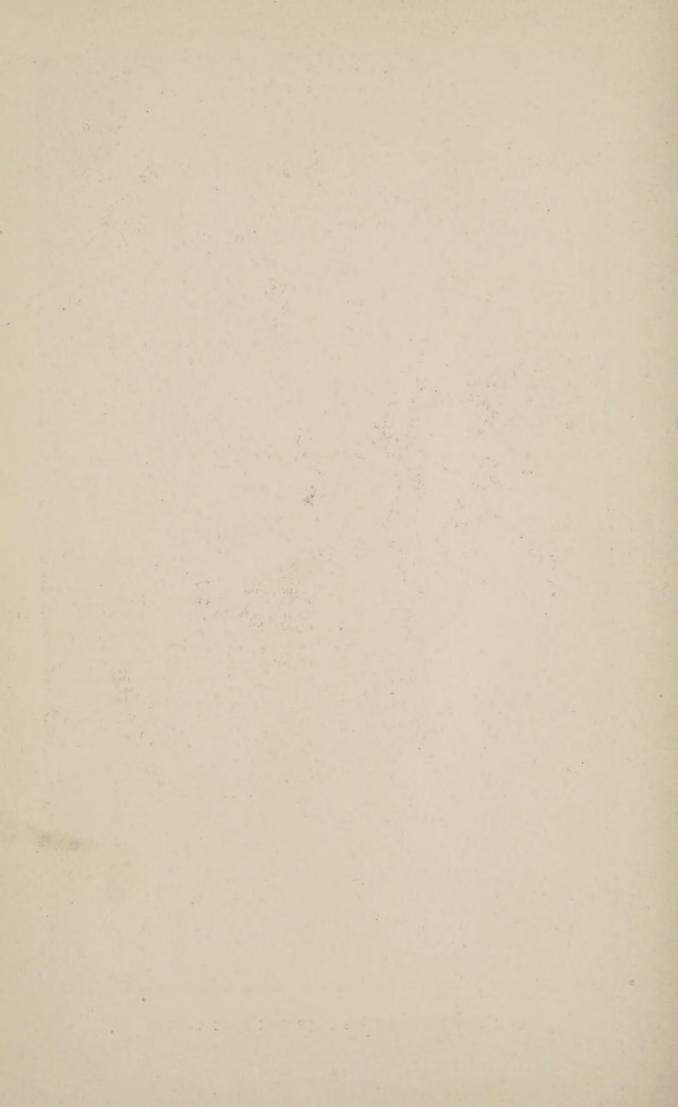
Uncle Will regarded the wire baskets doubtfully. "What are they meant for?" he asked.

"They are frying baskets, for croquettes or potato chips," the girl behind the counter explained.

"You don't want a frying basket, Mary Grace," her uncle urged.



SHE SPENT SOME TIME OVER THE BEAD CHAINS.



"Yes, I do; yes, I do," Mary Grace insisted. "It is pretty. I can put things in it."

"Some people plant ferns in them," the clerk suggested, "Perhaps the little girl could use it for that."

"Yes, I'll take it," said Mary Grace, and this settled the matter.

A small scrubbing-brush was the next purchase. "You seem to be domestic in your tastes," her uncle remarked.

Mary Grace did not know what domestic meant, but she knew what a scrubbingbrush was for. Then she spent some time over the bead chains, selecting several.

"Suppose we look at pictures now," Uncle Will suggested, standing between his niece and a counter covered with tins.

She agreed to this, though with her head over her shoulder she asked, "Don't you think we might buy one tin pan, Uncle Will?"

"I don't believe I would," he said.

The pictures were so interesting Mary Grace forgot the pans, and the rest of her purchases were harmless enough. A Jack-in-the-box, a rubber dog, a cube of pins and a box of toothpicks,—these last for Watts.

But now a difficulty arose.

"Shall I send them?" asked the clerk.

Mr. Sargent was just giving the number, when a protest went up from Mary Grace.

"I want to carry my package," she said.
"Nina and Nansie did."

It was one thing for the elegant Mr. Sargent to accompany his niece to the Ten Cent Store, and quite another to walk out the principal street in town with a knobby package under his arm. His dignity rebelled. "There are too many things. We can't carry them!" he said positively.

Mary Grace's lips quivered. "'Tisn't any

fun to go shopping and buy things if you can't carry them,—Nansie did."

It was most unreasonable in Mary Grace, but a crowded store was no place for argument. Mr. Sargent looked helplessly at the clerk. She came to his relief with the suggestion that they have all the small things tied up in the basket for the little girl to carry herself, and have the others sent.

Thus it was finally arranged though Mary Grace was by no means satisfied. "If you are naughty I can't bring you down town again,—ever," Uncle Will said gravely.

Mary Grace couldn't see why it was naughty to want to carry her package. She felt a little unhappy about it. She forgot it in the interest of walking home along the busy street, and when they stopped in to see Cousin Polly for a minute she heard Uncle Will telling about it and laughing, which was odd, to say the least.

They found Cousin Polly and the children

making cookies. When Nina and Nansie and L. B. ran in to see them, all done up in gingham aprons, a most delicious fragrance followed in their wake, and it seemed they were helping cut the cookies out in all sorts of interesting shapes.

Mary Grace wanted very much to see how it was done, so Cousin Polly took them into the kitchen, it being, as she explained, the cook's afternoon out, and tying another apron around Mary Grace's neck let her cut out some rings and stars, while her uncle was regaled with some fresh from the oven.

Mary Grace thought it was even more fun than going shopping. She was never allowed in the kitchen at home.

- "Children love so to make things," said Cousin Polly, beaming on the happy faces around the table.
- "And somebody I know loves to make them happy," added Uncle Will.

"I'm not the only one," Cousin Polly replied.

Mary Grace of course showed the children her purchases, and when she went home she gave Ailie the cube of pins and Watts the box of toothpicks which pleased them very much.

That night when Aunt Margaret asked if she had been a good girl, Mary Grace hesitated, remembering that Uncle Will had called her naughty. Aunt Margaret, when she heard the story, explained that it wasn't naughty to want to carry her package, but to insist upon it when Uncle Will did not think it best, was not being a good little girl.

The puzzle was why Uncle Will did not like to carry packages.

"Any way, he laughed when he told Miss Polly," she said; then she added, but I cried a little. I 'spect that wasn't being a star."

CHAPTER IX

A BLANK PAGE

The Book of Happy Days continued to grow. The stars did not forget to shine, and every night Cousin Polly added to the story. They even took the book to show Nellie, and Cousin Polly read her the chapter about their first visit to her.

Mary Grace also carried the chains she had bought at the Ten Cent Store, and let Nellie choose the one she liked best, and when this turned out to be the blue one which she preferred herself, she did not say a word, because Nellie couldn't walk.

It seemed very strange that a storm should sweep over the sky in the midst of such pleasant weather. There must have been something in the air that morning, not of course that you could really blame the air, but it is natural to try to find some excuse or explanation for naughtiness.

To begin with, Mary Grace cried when her hair was curled, and refused to wear the dress Ailie had laid out.

"It isn't much of a star you are being now. I wish Miss Polly could see you," Ailie said.

"I am not going to be a star any more. Stars don't shine in the daytime any way," announced Mary Grace.

She did not quite mean this, however, and brightened up a little after the process of dressing was over. The crossness was still there, only it was out of sight.

It happened that this same morning found Nina and Nansie in trouble, and—of all things—over a button-hook. Nothing would do but they must both use mamma's silver button-hook at the very same mo-

ment. As this was impossible there was a struggle.

"I am the oldest, I ought to have it," Nina cried.

"I got it first and I'm going to use it first," Nansie insisted, holding it fast. When Nina tried to take it from her she hurt her finger, and tears and angry words followed.

"I don't care which is oldest or which is youngest, you are both naughty girls," Anne declared, with strict impartiality. "I wonder what Mary Grace would say."

Cousin Polly, being occupied with some letters, did not notice the signs of conflict, and breakfast passed off quietly.

The trouble began again in the afternoon when the stars were playing together. They pretended Mary Grace was a princess, and rescued her from the lions, and then that she was a lame girl like Nellie, and they came to see her and brought her things.

It seemed to Mary Grace that the other children had the most fun, and after a while she refused to be a princess or a lame girl any longer.

"All right," said Nina, "then we'll play 'tally-ho' and you shan't ride in it."

This favorite game was played with a big armchair, on the back and arms of which the passengers sat while the driver occupied a table placed in front, from which he guided his spirited horses, two rockingchairs.

Not to be allowed to ride in the tally-ho was dreadful. Mary Grace began to cry.

Nansie comforted her and said she should ride, but Nina and L. B. called her a crybaby. The trouble was smoothed over by Ailie, who had been down-stairs talking to Anne and now came to see what was going on. When she left they were all happily seated in the big chair, while L. B. pulled his reins and made the horses go furiously.

"Our mother is coming home next day after to-morrow," said Nansie.

"I am so glad, 'cause she is the dearest, prettiest mother in the world," added Nina.

"No, she isn't," Mary Grace contradicted.

"My mother is."

"My mother is the best of all," L. B. insisted stoutly.

So the dispute began, and sad to say it ended by Mary Grace slapping Nansie, who pushed her off the chair, and L. B. and Nina—but really it isn't pleasant to tell about. Enough to say that such wails arose as brought Cousin Polly and Ailie and Anne all flying to the rescue.

They found four injured little mortals, each with a grievance to tell, all crying and trying to explain at once. Ailie wanted to take her baby home but Cousin Polly wouldn't let her. She refused to listen to any of the complaints; she said they needed

to be by themselves, and she put Nansie in her mother's room and Nina in the nursery, and leaving L. B., who was the most calm of them all, to sit on the third-story stairs, she took Mary Grace into her own room.

"It makes me feel dreadfully to have all my stars go out at once," Cousin Polly said, lifting Mary Grace to the sofa.

"I'm not going to be a star any more. I'm going home and never, never coming again. Nansie pushed me," she sobbed.

Miss Polly said nothing, and by and by Mary Grace stopped crying enough to notice how still it was. Out in the hall L. B. was kicking his heels against the step. Not as if he were angry, but just for something to do.

Miss Polly sat by the window, and by and by she said, "I wonder what Nellie would think."

Mary Grace caught her breath with a sob. She had forgotten Nellie.

"I am afraid she is the only star left," Miss Polly added.

The storm gradually calmed down, and it was not so very long before Cousin Polly gathered a tearful little group around her to talk it over.

"First I am going to guess what the trouble was," she said. "Somebody, I think, forgot to be kind. Now each one of you try to remember—never mind what the others did—did you do anything unkind? Did you, Nansie?"

"Why, Cousin Polly, I pushed Mary Grace, but she—"

"Never mind that. Mary Grace, did you do anything unkind?"

"I touched her just a little bit, like that, on her arm," Mary Grace laid a gentle hand on Miss Polly's arm, "'cause she said my mother wasn't pretty."

In this way, a little at a time, the whole story came out. Cousin Polly looked at the

tear-stained faces. "What silly children," she exclaimed. "Don't you know each child must love its own mother best and think her the dearest, prettiest mother in the world? Nina and Nansie think it of their mother, and Mary Grace and Little Boy Brown of theirs, and they are all right about it. Besides, Nina and Nansie haven't seen Mary Grace's mother and she hasn't seen theirs. Wasn't it a foolish thing to quarrel about, and spoil a page in our book?"

The children looked at each other. They had forgotten the book.

"Won't there be any story to-night?" asked Nina.

Cousin Polly shook her head. "It hasn't been a happy day," she said.

They all looked very sorrowful over this.

"When you have been naughty what can you do?" asked Cousin Polly.

- "You can be sorry," Nannie answered.
- "And not do it any more," said Mary Grace.
 - "Are you sorry?"
- L. B. held up his hand as he did in school. "I am," he said.

They all were, there was no doubt about it, and Cousin Polly talked to them a little more and reminded to tell the Father in heaven about it that night.

So the stars began to shine again, but there was no helping that blank page in the Book of Happy Days. Cousin Polly wrote on it the date and these words:

[&]quot;Here is just a single line,
To say the stars forgot to shine."

CHAPTER X

PREPARATIONS

Christmas was coming, as it usually does before anybody is quite ready for it. That is, of course, excepting the children.

"I wish it would come ten times a year," said Little Boy Brown.

"I wish it would come every day," Nansie said, and the others quite agreed with her, and couldn't understand Cousin Polly when she remarked that if it came every day it wouldn't be any better than any other day.

Each morning there seemed a little more of Christmas in the air. Even the drugstore windows took on a festive appearance, and as for the grocery, it seemed fairly

bursting with good things, and the dignified gray cat actually looked as if he smelled a Christmas mouse—if you know what that is.

Miss Clinton had talked of going home, but nobody would listen to such a preposterous idea. But this time she was being found out. She had friends everywhere, and the people who knew her always wanted some one else to know her, so she began to have a great many calls and invitations.

Miss Polly said she had come away from home for rest and quiet, not for society, but Mrs. Blanchard, who had returned quite well again, said she should not give all her time to the children, which seemed to be her idea of rest and quiet. "What was the use of having a charming cousin if you could not show her off?" she wanted to know.

Uncle Will said Miss Polly did not care

for polite society, but preferred butchers and bakers and postmen.

"Why, Uncle Will, the postman is very polite," urged Mary Grace who overheard his remark.

"He is polite but he isn't society," her uncle explained gravely.

"Are you society?" Mary Grace asked, puzzled.

"Cousin Polly likes everybody," Nina announced, going back to the original question.

"And everybody likes her," Little Boy Brown added.

Cousin Polly laughed and said this was the politest society she had ever enjoyed, and that Uncle Will was entirely mistaken about her preferences.

Cousin Polly's favorite motto was, "We are here to help," and she very well knew there were people to help in every sort of society. If there was anything she did not

realize it was how much good her gracious, happy presence alone often did. Uncle Will said her spirit was catching, and so it was. Certainly the little stars caught some of their light from her, and in spite of the demands of society she found time for them.

Mary Grace and Uncle Will comparing notes before the fire in the evening discovered that there were two ways of seeing life, from the outside and from the inside. Having cake to eat, or even to hand around is not the only pleasure; there is the stirring it up, putting it in the pan and baking it.

Mary Grace had had Christmas trees, and parties, and all that, but for the first time in her life she was really in it. Put away safely, where she could look at it every day, she had a book-mark for Uncle Will made by her own fingers, and she was now making a small pincushion for auntie to

carry in her traveling bag. Aunt Margaret was helping her. Besides, there were the trimmings for Nellie's tree. For weeks the stars had been busy on these.

There were chains of gilt paper, strings of popcorn and cranberries; there were some gay-colored balls made by Aunt Margaret, and best of all, the dearest pair of pink slippers she had knitted for Nellie. Mary Grace hung over them enchanted.

It was Cousin Polly of course who suggested giving Nellie a Christmas tree. She rather suspected times were hard at the postman's this winter, with so many children, and Nellie's illness, and everything in the way of groceries so high, so she asked Mrs. Meguire one day if the stars might trim a tree for Nellie.

The postman's wife wiped her eyes as she acknowledged they could not do much for Christmas this year, and had told the children they must not expect any presents. Miss Clinton assured her that the stars were burning up with energy; that it was a mercy to give them something to do; and nothing would make them so happy as working for Nellie.

In this way it began. When Uncle Will heard of it, through Mary Grace, he wanted to give the tree. Cousin Polly said he might if he would be sure not to have it too big, for the postman's house was small.

If you haven't experienced the thrill of delight that comes of preparing for something, of having things put away in a drawer which you can pull open and peep into several times a day, of feeling each night when you put your head on your pillow that it is one day nearer, then you cannot sympathize with the stars.

Half the pleasure in life is in getting ready for things. Uncle Will, working on the Civic League over the drafting of a bill for the enforcement of factory laws, felt it. He was not bored these days. Being wide awake he saw matters of interest on all sides. He even looked at the people in the crowded street cars in a new way.

This spirit of friendliness induced him one day to lean over and speak to Mr. Brown, who sat opposite. L. B.'s chubby face had had from the first a familiar look to him, and now he knew why, as he recalled meeting Mr. Brown in an architect's office on several occasions some years before. Two months ago it would not have occurred to him there was any reason for entering into conversation with this somewhat shabby-looking young man.

Mr. Brown remembered Mr. Sargent perfectly, but did not respond very cordially at first. It was only upon mention of L. B. and Miss Polly that he began to thaw.

Mr. Sargent asked for Mrs. Brown, explaining that he had heard of her illness from Miss Clinton.

"Miss Clinton is the kindest person I ever met," Mr. Brown said earnestly.

"I have known her since I was a boy and I believe she is," Mr. Sargent replied.

"I can't tell you how good she has been to us. She has a way of cheering you up, of making you feel there is a way out of your difficulties."

So Mr. Brown had difficulties. Mr. Sargent asked if he were still with the same firm.

"No, I have opened an office of my own, and am ready for business," Mr. Brown answered with a grim smile that said he was more ready than busy.

"I shall be wanting something in your line; I'll look in on you one of these days," were Mr. Sargent's parting words.

He might never have thought of it again,

however, if he had not heard Miss Polly say that she wished she could cheer up all the discouraged people at Christmas, if only for one day. "Particularly the people who have honestly tried and have not succeeded," she added.

This suggested Mr. Brown. He had been pushed out of his position to make room for a relative of a member of the firm, Miss Clinton said. Mrs. Brown had told her about it, and the difficulty he was finding in getting a start by himself.

"If I remember, he did good work on the plans for our office building. I'll give him something if I can," Mr. Sargent said.

"There is nothing so splendid as giving people a chance. If you can help him, Will, I shall be so glad." Miss Polly spoke as if it were a personal matter.

CHAPTER XI

AUNT CLARICE

Aunt Clarice two hundred miles away, was feeling annoyed and anxious. Her worst fears, like Mary Grace's wishes, seemed to be coming true.

It had not been possible to keep the real state of affairs from her for long. Her brother wrote explaining. "You must not worry about Mary Grace," he said, "I flatter myself I am a success as a guardian, and in any emergency Aunt Margaret is here to be appealed to. My old friend, Miss Pauline Clinton, is visiting next door, at the Blanchards', who, by the way, are delightful people. There are two little girls who have made friends with Mary Grace, and

altogether she and I have become rather intimate with our neighbors. I am sure you will like them."

"Will like them," indeed! Miss Sargent had no idea of liking them, or of knowing them even distantly. Who were these people of whom she had never heard? She knew who Miss Clinton was, the sister of her brother's friend, daughter of the well-known professor, but there was no telling what sort of a person she was. As for the children, Miss Sargent had taken up a prejudice against them. She had seen them running about the yard, bareheaded and in gingham aprons, and was sure they were not the associates she desired for her delicate little flower.

As for poor, plain Aunt Margaret, what good was she? Aunt Margaret was something of a trial to her aristocratic niece, having in truth much the same pride in being a plain old-fashioned Methodist that

Miss Clarice had in being something quite the opposite.

"You know, Alice," Miss Sargent said to her sister, "Mary Grace is at a most impressionable age. Till now I have been able to guard her from everything inharmonious. I have wished her to come in contact with nothing but the most delicate refinement, and it is hard that through no fault of mine she should be exposed to alien influences."

This phrase pleased Miss Sargent, and she dwelt upon it, forgetting her experience with Dorothy.

A letter from Dorothy's mother further annoyed her. Mrs. Van Cleeve complained that Mr. Sargent was deserting his old friends this winter,—for philanthropy, she heard.

Miss Clarice decided she must go home if she had to go on crutches, before things were turned completely upside down.

She must find a new governess for Mary Grace and investigate her brother's philanthropy.

A few days before Christmas the journey began to seem possible. She waited till the last minute then telegraphed to her brother that she would arrive on the evening train.

As she approached home Miss Sargent found herself feeling excited and almost nervous. Two months had passed since she had seen Mary Grace. She hoped they would think to send her down in the carriage. Her brother she was sure would meet her at the junction outside the city, but in this she was disappointed, and when she descended from the car in the station, assisted by her maid and the porter, there was no familiar face waiting to greet her.

It was very disappointing. Her brother might have been detained, but where was Watts? Marie assisted her to the waiting-

room and went to look for the carriage, returning to say it was not to be seen.

It was plain her telegram had gone astray, yet Miss Sargent could not control a feeling of being slighted in some way. She was a person of importance, accustomed to be treated as such, and after a long absence to have her arrival ignored, to be compelled to take a public cab was extremely annoying.

Her imagination began to picture all sorts of direful possibilities. Mary Grace was ill. Something had happened to Will. By the time she reached the house Miss Sargent was the victim of excessive nervousness.

Watts, who opened the door, though too well trained to betray any great emotion, was clearly surprised to see his mistress.

"How is it, Watts, that the carriage was not sent to meet me? I telegraphed to Mr. Sargent this morning that I would be here."

Watts did not understand it. Mr. Sargent had been out of town all day. Yes, he did remember a telegram. It had been put with some letters on Mr. Sargent's table.

From the library came the sound of voices. Miss Sargent moved in that direction. She was a most stately person, and the cane she leaned on seemed actually to add to her stateliness. At the open door she paused.

Directly before her was the glowing wood fire, and on the rug in front of it were four children—one of them her own little niece—and a lady, upon whose animated face their eyes were fixed. At one side, a little withdrawn, sat Aunt Margaret, knitting placidly, and the table near her was piled with something that certainly did not belong on a library table. All this

Miss Sargent's swift glance took in. Not to be expected was bad enough, but to walk in upon a scene of such content made her feel she was not even wanted.

It happened that Cousin Polly who had been taking lessons from Aunt Margaret in slipper making, ran over in the afternoon to ask some further instruction. Aunt Margaret was in the library and after her questions were answered Miss Clinton stayed chatting with her. She had been to a luncheon, and looked very handsome in her light dress and plumy hat.

Up-stairs in the nursery the children were putting the finishing touches to the decorations for Nellie's tree. A box of glittering things had arrived from down town and they were exclaiming over them when they heard Cousin Polly was down-stairs. Nothing would do but they must show her their new treasures and away they flew, while Ailie followed with the box.

"It must be that extravagant Will," Cousin Polly said when Ailie spread them out on the table. "Won't Nellie have a beautiful tree?"

"And we are going to trim it to-morrow, Cousin Polly, aren't we?" cried Nansie. Then they all clapped their hands and danced around the table like wild Indians.

Among other things was an angel with shining wings, and a big gold star to go at the top of the tree, and yards and yards of gleaming tinsel, which sent out sparks of light when Watts came in and put some wood on the fire.

"Come, sit down on the rug and let's talk," Cousin Polly suggested, taking an ottoman herself.

Like four little pigeons the children fluttered down on the bearskin beside her, getting as close as possible, laughing and out of breath. "Take care of Miss Polly's dress," Aunt Margaret warned them.

"Doesn't she look nice," said Nina. "Is this your best dress, Cousin Polly?"

Miss Clinton only laughed, and said it was a nuisance to be dressed up when you wished to have a really sociable time.

Mary Grace slipped a small hand into Miss Polly's. "Isn't it lovely?" she exclaimed.

"What, mousie?"

Mary Grace's eyes traveled to the table with its burden of shining things, then returned to her companions on the hearth rug. "Everything," she said joyously.

"Why do we put stars on our Christmas trees?" Cousin Polly asked.

"Becauses Jesus had a star," Little Boy Brown answered.

"Yes; when he was born a tiny baby a beautiful star shone out. It was so bright and clear it guided the Wise Men across the

desert to the little town of Bethlehem. It meant that the tiny baby was to grow up to be a great light in the world. Something like this happens whenever a little child is born. A new star does not appear in the sky, but a new light comes into the world."

"Can we be Christmas stars?" asked L. B.

"'Course we can. That's why we are trimming Nellie's tree," said Nansie.

"It is fun to be a Christmas star," Mary Grace said, pressing her palms together softly.

Something at this moment caused Miss Polly's eyes to turned toward the door where they encountered Miss Sargent's. Then Mary Grace's cry, "Auntie, auntie!" broke the stillness, as she rushed upon the stately figure.

Miss Sargent bent to clasp her, "My darling baby," she said. An awkward moment followed. The children stood and stared, Cousin Polly's eyes looked as if she were trying not to laugh. Aunt Margaret advanced in placid surprise. "We were not looking for you, Clarice."

"It seems not," her niece replied stiffly. Miss Polly went forward without waiting for Aunt Margaret to remember her. "Miss Sargent, I am Miss Clinton," she said. "Perhaps you have heard your brother speak of me. I feel like apologizing for what must seem to you an intrusion. We had not planned to give you such a prompt welcome." Miss Polly's manner was winning, and, as has been said, she had on her prettiest clothes.

Miss Sargent couldn't hold out against her; and when Miss Polly went on to hope she would give her a chance to know her sometime, and asked sympathetically about her journey and her injured ankle, Miss Sargent could not help responding with a degree of graciousness she was afterwards inclined to regret.

This was when she heard about Nellie's Christmas tree. If Mary Grace had been more experienced she would have avoided the subject this evening.

"Don't you think Mary Grace is looking well?" Uncle Will asked his sister, proud of the results of his guardianship. He had come in just at dinner-time.

Miss Sargent acknowledged that she did. "And she has changed; she seems older."

"I am most as big a girl as Nina," Mary Grace remarked, leaning against her aunt's chair.

"How did you come to know these little girls?" Aunt Clarice asked.

"Uncle Will took me to see them," Mary Grace replied. "We are going to trim Nellie's tree to-morrow," she added.

" And who is Nellie?"

"She is the postman's girl. Did you know he had a little girl, auntie? She can't walk, so we are going to see her and trim her tree for her. They live in the littlest house!"

"You can't go there, dear, but we can send the things; that will be very nice, but auntie's darling mustn't go to such places, she might be exposed to some disease."

Mary Grace stood firm, though her face took on an anxious expression. "But we do go, don't we, Uncle Will? And it isn't catching, Ailie said it wasn't," she urged.

"The place is all right enough, sister. Perfectly clean and respectable, otherwise Miss Polly would not have taken the children there," said Mr. Sargent.

Here Ailie came to take Mary Grace to bed. As Aunt Clarice kissed her she said they would settle it to-morrow

Already, in a few hours' time Miss Sargent

was weary of Miss Polly's name. "She seems to have turned the world upside down. "I don't know when I shall get Mary Grace under control," she exclaimed.

"She doesn't often leave things as she finds them, but they are usually the better for her stirring up," said her brother.

"Miss Polly is a good and sensible woman," added Aunt Margaret.

CHAPTER XII

HELPING SANTA CLAUS

The postman was busy, tremendously busy; so much so he required an assistant, and they both staggered under the load they had to carry. There were packages hung around their necks, tied on their arms, overflowing from their bags in all sorts of ways, until they might have been mistaken for Santa Claus himself.

Certainly Santa Claus was never cheerier than Mr. Meguire. At the sound of his whistle people came running to their doors to see what he had brought, and he had a merry word for everybody.

"I guess he is glad we are going to trim Nellie's tree," Nansie said, dancing about the room where her mother and Cousin Polly were busy doing up parcels in tissue paper tied with red ribbons.

"What do you think?" cried Nina running in, "Anne says, Ailie says, Miss Sargent says Mary Grace can't go."

Cousin Polly dropped the bolt of red ribbon. "Are you sure? That will be too bad. She must go,—poor little Miss Mouse. I'll go myself and explain to Miss Sargent. She doesn't understand."

"Polly, do you think you'd better?"
Mrs. Blanchard asked.

"It isn't minding my own business exactly, but I am going."

When Cousin Polly said she was going to do anything, in that tone, she always did it.

Uncle Will wondered afterward what she said to his sister. He had exhausted his eloquence all to no effect.

Miss Polly began by being very humble,

and when she was humble she was particularly dangerous, which of course Miss Sargent didn't know. She was the one who was responsible for it, Miss Polly confessed. She drew a picture of the postman's family, and of Nellie; she told how clean the house was, and how gentle and well behaved the children were. She explained how she happened to take the stars to see Nellie,—because she thought it would do them good to help some one less fortunate than themselves. She asked Miss Sargent if she did not think it was well for us all to come in contact at times with a life different from our own.

She said she had not dreamed of doing anything that Mary Grace's aunt would not approve, and if she had, she was very sorry. Mary Grace was a dear little girl, and seemed so happy to be with other children. Would not Miss Sargent allow her to go this once?

After all it was not so much what she said. It was a certain compelling power which at times breathed from Miss Clinton's very presence. From being annoyed Miss Sargent became gracious, and finally surrendered.

She spoke of her own theories in regard to Mary Grace's bringing up. Her sister-in-law was so young, she said, it had largely devolved upon her. While she did not approve of her niece going to see the post-man's little girl, she acknowledged the possibility that the Meguires might be an exception to most persons of that class, and she reluctantly consented to let her go to the tree trimming. Miss Polly listened patiently, and they parted excellent friends.

They were going to help Santa Claus, Cousin Polly said when the merry procession started out, with Ailie and Anne to carry the things. The stars were in a state of wild delight. Such laughing and jumping up and down and clapping of hands was really not suitable behavior for the street except at Christmas time. People turned to look at the gay little company, and laughed in sympathy.

Before they reached the Meguires' Cousin Polly reminded them that Nellie could not stand so much noise, and if they did not remember, she said she would send them home with Anne, and she and Ailie would trim the tree. This awful threat reduced them to mouse-like quiet for about two minutes.

Nellie was expecting them, for the tree was not to be a secret. She was to have the pleasure of seeing it trimmed, and it was already there, firmly planted in a box opposite her bed.

First there was the fun of opening the boxes and spreading the contents over Nellie's bed, and of explaining, "We made



IT WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL TREE EVER SEEN.



this, Nellie," or "Aunt Margaret made that."

Cousin Polly stood on the step-ladder, and the stars ran back and forth, handing her things. First the big golden star, then the gauzy-winged angels, then the strings of popcorn and cranberries and tinsel, and all the other treasures, and they really tried very hard not to shriek with joy.

When it was done it was the most beauful tree ever seen. Mrs. Meguire said so, and so did the little postmen, peeping shyly in at the door, and of course Nellie thought it was, for she had watched and laughed and enjoyed every minute of the time.

"Now we are ready for Santa Claus," Cousin Polly said when there wasn't room for another thing. "Let's sing Nellie our Christmas song and go home."

And gathering close to her they sang the song Cousin Polly had taught them, beginning, "There's a wonderful tree."

Mary Grace wanted to tell Nellie about the pink slippers, but they, along with a number of other bundles, were not to be undone till to-morrow.

By the time they had wished Nellie a Merry Christmas and had their things on it was almost dark. The electric lights were coming out, up and down the street, and overhead the stars were beginning to shine. In the air was that delicious, mysterious something which makes Christmas eve different from all other evenings.

How pleasant it was to walk along looking in at the lighted windows where holly wreaths hung, and where now and then you had a glimpse of a tree; past the busy grocery where there were still some good things left, and then home to hang up your stocking and go to sleep thinking about Santa Claus!

Aunt Clarice asked Mary Grace if she had had a nice time.

"I had the best time I ever had in my life," Mary Grace answered emphatically.

Miss Sargent did not understand. She had a misgiving that her niece's tastes were not quite refined.

She was feeling relieved about the Blanchards. Mr. Blanchard, she had learned, had recently become a member of one of the oldest and most distinguished law firms in the city. They were very good sort of people, Mrs. Van Cleeve assured her. "Not just our kind, but still persons one can afford to know."

CHAPTER XIII

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

"Happy New Year," said the postman, handing Mr. Brown a letter at the gate.

Mr. Brown opened it, then turned back to tell Mrs. Brown about it.

The letter was from Mr. Sargent, engaging him to draw the plans for a block of dwelling houses. There were some pleasant words about Mr. Brown's work, and a check was enclosed which he was asked to accept in advance.

"What a good beginning," Mrs. Brown exclaimed.

"And I used not to like him. I thought he was—well, rather stuck up, you know," Mr. Brown added repentantly.

136

"A Happy New Year," said the card in the box of Catherine Mermets Miss Polly received. When she lifted the roses she found a folded paper. It was a copy of the bill to enforce factory laws, just printed, and it seemed to please her as much as the flowers.

"Happy New Year, Uncle Will," said Mary Grace, coming down to breakfast.

"Happy New Year to you," her uncle answered. "What do you say to making some New Year's calls this afternoon?"

" Me?"

" You and me."

"Goody!" Mary Grace exclaimed.

Aunt Clarice remarked that that was a silly expression. "Could you not say 'That will be nice,' or, 'I should like that'?"

Uncle Will laughed, probably remembering the time when he used to say "Goody."

After lunch he, and Mary Grace in her

very best clothes, drove about making calls on certain aunts and cousins and old family friends, and Mary Grace held up her head and spoke when she was spoken to, not to mention several times when she wasn't, and her fingers did not go near her mouth, but for the most part stayed in her new ermine muff.

Aunt Margaret, who was one of those called on, seemed particularly glad to see them, and asked after Nina and Nansie and Little Boy Brown as if she missed them all.

When they had said good-by, and were rolling homeward, Uncle Will said, "It seems a long time since that evening when you and I sat by the fire and you asked me if I had ever been left."

Mary Grace thought it was very long ago. She had almost forgotten about being left.

"And you wished for some children to play with, didn't you?"

Mary Grace nodded her head joyfully. "And it came true," she said.

They ended their calls at the Blanchards', where everybody came down to see them, from Mr. Blanchard to baby Charles.

Cousin Polly said their visit was opportune, for now they would appear in the last chapter of the Book of Happy Days.

"Are you really going to admit me?"
Uncle Will asked. "Once you told me
you did not think I deserved it."

"Yes, I'll grant you a place among the stars now, if you won't be too set up," she answered laughing.

"How can he help being set up—among the stars?" Mr. Blanchard asked.

"But why do you call it the last chapter?" it occurred to Mr. Sargent to inquire.

"Isn't it dreadful? She is going home," Mrs. Blanchard explained, mournfully.

"Having been here only three months," Cousin Polly added.

But really in three months she had come to seem like a permanent institution. The idea of losing her cast a shadow on the happy new year.

Miss Polly had them all laughing in a very few minutes, however, and then Mr. Brown and L. B. came in, and there were more good wishes.

"It is so pleasant to know some of our neighbors," Mrs. Blanchard remarked, "and this is one thing we owe to Cousin Polly."

When they came to think of it, a great deal seemed owing to her, and yet she said she had not done anything.

You may be sure the stars did not forget her. Nina and Nansie and Mary Grace continued to play together, and later on they shared the instructions of a visiting governess, Miss Sargent finding it difficult to fill Miss Susanne's place.

When Mary Grace's mother and father returned they were surprised at the change in her.

"How she has grown!" they said.

"How she has improved! She seems quite strong and well."

"All owing to my guardianship," Uncle Will said.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Mary Grace's father. "And how does it happen that you have gone into the Civic League and are taking an interest in politics? I don't understand it at all."

"That is because you did not meet Miss Polly," Uncle Will answered.

THE END.



